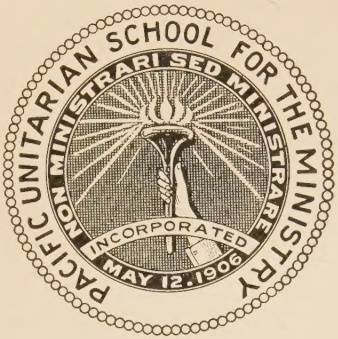
RALPH WALDO EMERSON

ROBERT M. GAY

THE MURRAY HILL BIOGRAPHIES



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THE MURRAY HILL BIOGRAPHIES

EMERSON

BOOKS BY ROBERT M. GAY

EMERSON: A STUDY OF THE POET AS SEER
FACT, FANCY AND OPINION
WRITING THROUGH READING
THE 8.45
THE RIVERSIDE BOOK OF VERSE

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RALPH WALDO EMERSON

EMERSON

A Study of the Poet as Seer

By

ROBERT M. GAY

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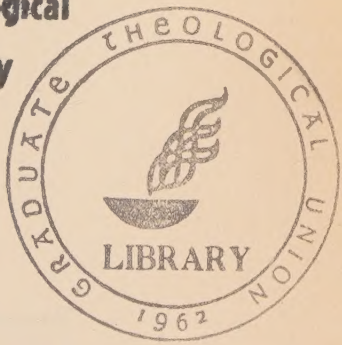

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FIRST EDITION

TO MY MOTHER

22107

PREFACE

In writing this book, I have tried to confine myself to narrative and interpretation, in the desire to persuade people, and especially young people, to read Emerson; and have as a rule eschewed criticism, because I have not thought that my notions concerning the truth or falsity of his ideas were important. Wherever possible, I have quoted his own words, with the double purpose of letting him speak for himself and of giving the reader a variety of specimens of his thought and style. That I have been able to do so is owing to the courtesy of the Houghton Mifflin Company, who have permitted me to use excerpts from the Works, Letters, and Journals, and from the biographies of Holmes, Cabot, Emerson, and Firkins. I am also indebted to the same firm for the use of quotations from Havelock Ellis's *The Dance of Life* and from Thoreau's *Journals*.

Simmons College, Boston.
April 2, 1928.

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THE MURRAY HILL BIOGRAPHIES

EMERSON

EMERSON

A STUDY OF THE POET AS SEER

INTRODUCTION

IT WAS to the men who grew up between 1840 and 1870 that Emerson spoke clearly. I do not remember that we heard much of him during the eighteen-eighties and -nineties. My own discovery of him came by way of a chance and cheap copy of the *Essays* that drifted into our house when I was a boy. From that day to this it can hardly be said that he has been a living force in our educational institutions; and this is the more noteworthy because, while American youth has been taking him as a matter of course, a classic, his influence among the youth of Europe has been steady and strong.

Of course, academic neglect may not mean much. No doubt there are many solitary boys who are getting their first heady taste of idealism in *Nature* and the *Essays;* but I think it is still true that, excepting a poet here and there, the run of American men, whatever Emerson may have meant to them in their 'teens and twenties, have not returned to him. The reason is not hard to find. For men absorbed in making a living, in the externalities of invention, expansion, efficiency, reform, and social progress, his insistence upon

a spiritual regimen, upon the salutary influences of nature and of solitude, easily comes to appear the meanderings of a lofty but idle speculation. Even his principle of self-reliance, which they have accepted without question, they have also accepted without examination, interpreting it, often enough, to mean some sort of practical getting ahead, a philosophy of material success.

It is curious, too, how readily one comes to view him in retrospect as a cold person. Perhaps this is the fate of all idealists, about whom, for the practical man, hangs an interlunar chill. Most men, as they become middle-aged, become, as they say, realists, and realism, though it may be ugly, is intimate, or for some reason seems so. And even some of the men who are idealists have the same feeling for Emerson's special brand of idealism. Coventry Patmore, who certainly was not a realist in the popular sense, complains that though "Emerson was a sweet and sunny spirit, the sunshine was that of the long Polar day, which enlightens but does not fructify." Emerson was, moreover, a New Englander, born in Boston and a graduate of Harvard College, and those who derive from other parts are wont to ascribe to him the atmosphere of his region, which is reputed to be frosty.

Whether he has or has not been read of late by Americans, his spirit has been sufficiently perceptible in American life. And although transcendentalism has taken some queer turnings since his day, and although his idealism, which he thought solid enough, has at times become vapoury and thin, there is still enough of

his thought afloat in the minds of men for him to feel at home in our modern scene. One suspects that it would be, not among the "intellectuals" of our time, but in business and labour, nowadays often the objects of satire, and, above all, among the youth of the land, the subject of despairing moralists, that he would be most at ease. He would be aware of all the satirist derides and the moralist deplores, but he would be quick to detect a leaven that is working in the mind of men, perhaps more strongly than at any intervening time, for what he conceived as righteousness.

Unfortunately, quite early the idea was implanted in the American consciousness that Emerson is hard reading. Professor Beers long ago made the point.

> If people who write essays on Emerson would stop saying fine things about him and tell us what he means, they would do more service to criticism. It is significant, by the way, that the question asked about Emerson is, What does he *mean?* and about Carlyle, What does he *want?* Both these questions were put by plain people a generation ago. Answers enough were forthcoming—but in the shape of fresh oracles. The plain people were told, among other things, that the ideas of the Reason (*Vernunft*) could not be translated into the language of the Understanding (*Verstand*); and thereupon, examining themselves diligently, came to the mortifying conclusion that the former of these organs must have been left out of them. Mr. Lowell, too, abused them for wanting an edition of Emerson "in words of one syllable for infant minds." And he went on to say: "The bother with Mr. Emerson is that though he writes in prose, he is essentially a poet." But surely this is not the whole of the bother; for after making every allowance for the needs of poetic expression, it still remains true—does it not?—that the poem should have a meaning capable of statement in prose? . . . The real bother with Emerson is that his *Weltanschauung* is unfamiliar to most readers and that, being a poet, he nowhere formulated it. His position toward systematic

philosophies is almost consciously defined by him in what he says of Plato: "He has not a system. The dearest defenders and disciples are at fault. He attempted a theory of the universe, and his theory is not complete or self-evident. One man thinks this; and another, that; he has said one thing in one place and the reverse of it in another place."[1]

The "bother," as Professor Beers goes on to say, lies mainly in the fact that the plain man's *Weltanschauung,* or view of the world, is a common-sense one, non-speculative and artless, while Emerson's is the fruit of a special temperament and of some metaphysical thinking. For special temperaments like his, however, his view is no doubt as natural and ingenuous as the plain man's, and for that very reason he was not always careful to explain it. Besides, it must be admitted that both his temper and his impressionistic literary methods led him at times either to write something very like nonsense or to put down reflections which, if carried to their conclusions, would have revealed themselves as half truths or fallacies. Some of his early biographers, like Moncure Conway, did his reputation harm by approaching him with the reverence due to a messiah, the rich humanity of the man being blurred by a too supine acceptance of his every word. It is perhaps this as much as anything else that has made him congeal into a classic. The notion that he is a hard writer has, moreover, been fostered, though unintentionally, by his commentators, who have often scared readers away from him by emphasizing his obscurities.

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[1]Henry A. Beers, *Points of View,* 1904.

Whatever difficulty he does present does not reside in his style, which for the most part is simple, clear, and almost homely, but either in his ideas or in his way of putting his ideas together. Concrete and specific terms he loved, and folk words were well-nigh a passion. But, as I have said, he sets out from assumptions which he is not always careful to explain or even to state. He cannot be forever reminding the reader that he is an idealist who believes thus and so. And he has been living with these assumptions for years, until they have become as familiar and intimate as the fireside cat. In the rhetorical device of transition, moreover, so well known to college freshmen, he is often deplorably wanting. The oracular or gnomic or sibylline style of speaking has never been notable for its connection, but it seems always to have had one great virtue: it has made people think or, at least, guess and wonder.

What his fundamental assumptions were I shall try to expound. But that they were really as difficult as his commentators have made them seems doubtful. There are vast stretches of his exposition in which, though always implied, they are no more visible than a sub-stratum of rock beneath a fertile soil. Professor Beers seems to exaggerate the plain man's difficulty. Emerson always had the plain man in mind, believing, like all great teachers, in a complete democracy of the spirit. His works are full of praises of the artisan, the business man, the farmer, the craftsman, the boy or girl, because he valued above all the ingenuous and unsophisticated view of the world. What constitutes,

indeed, both the strength and, for light minds, the danger of his teaching is just that it is primarily emotional and intuitional—in short, poetic.

It is constantly forgotten by those who write about Emerson that he in a quite literal sense had nothing to teach. He would have been false to his deepest convictions if he had sought to impose his ideas upon others. What he had to offer was not a body of truth or even a conglomerate of truths, but a technique for discovering truth.

As I see him he was, nevertheless, essentially a teacher-poet or poet-teacher. His pedagogy rested upon one great conception, that education consists in invigorating the *imagination*. After he had formed his opinions, he never, until he was too old, entered a classroom as a teacher; but all his life, in cities, towns, and backwoods settlements alike, he was engaged in trying to arouse the American mind to a poetic or imaginative view of life and the world. This unfaltering belief in the power of imagination is really the key to all he said and did. It explains his championship of self-reliance and of the Ideal Theory. It makes clear his suspicion of both unqualified transcendentalism and unqualified scepticism. For imagination or intuition—"instinct," he rather unfortunately called it—is the power of man that raises him above thralldom to things, time, space, and causality. It is the essence of all true science, philosophy, religion, art, and poetry. And its exercise is necessarily individual. Man imagining is man standing on his own feet or, rather, man flying alone, as in dreams. And the higher he flies the

lonelier he is. And what he brings back from his flight may be unintelligible to anyone else. A man who discovers a synthetic rubber has always a public, and in ten years millions who use his product may not even know his name; but a man who, like Plato, Swedenborg, or Blake, discovers a synthetic heaven, though he may have followers, will always have a special lien on his property, and it will always be in some sort his heaven. For the "plain man" synthetic rubber will be the more valuable product, and he may be right. Emerson would have said that every man must discover heaven himself. Blake intimated that most men "build a hell in heaven's despite."

"Canst thou by searching find out God?" asked Zophar the Naamathite of Job, the answer he expected being obviously, No. But ever since his day and, no doubt, long before, the search has gone restlessly on. Two types of soul, however, the mystic and the poetic, have never failed to protest against it.

> Think you, 'mid all this mighty sum
> Of things forever speaking,
> That nothing of itself will come,
> And we must still be seeking?

asks the poet; "the kingdom of God is within you," declares the mystic. Often enough, as in Wordsworth, Shelley, Whitman, Emerson, the poetical and the mystical are united.

From his childhood Emerson was surrounded by propulsions toward theology or philosophy, and they carried him a long way from his native bent. The special cast of mind that distinguished him from his

ancestors and relatives—all estimable men and women —was poetic, while theirs was theological, scholarly, or practical. During his formative years, the pressure which drove him toward the church was very great; his college instruction was largely moralistic; the intellectual struggles of his early manhood centred perforce in problems of faith and free will; his later profession of lecturer tended to fasten on him the didactic or apostolic pose. He escaped solemnity because he possessed humility and a sense of humour, and still more because his attitude toward all things and all men was essentially that of a poet.

The attitude of a poet is that *experience* has values apart from ulterior intentions. I may illustrate by a trivial personal incident. I remember once discussing various trials and tribulations of my own with a biologist who had suffered equally. "Well," said I, in conclusion, "we can at least chalk it all up as so much experience." "Yes," he replied, "but what in the Devil's name shall we do with the experience?" I, as representing a kind of poetic *Weltanschauung,* felt that experience is, to quote Emerson in another connection, "its own excuse for being," with its own values, aside from any utilitarian ends it may serve in the future; while he, as representing the scientific absorption in means and ends, practical uses, could find nothing in unpleasant experience except a mysterious waste. Tolstoi defined art as "the communication of *valuable experience.*" Emerson would have agreed, if the word "valuable" was given the meaning, not of "useful" but of "enriching" or "character forming," and if

within experience was included every kind of living, from the merely physical to the imaginative or spiritual.

Mr. Firkins begins his chapter on Emerson's philosophy with the following declaration: "The secret of Emerson may be conveyed in one word, the superlative, even the superhuman, value which he found in the unit of experience, the direct, primary, individual act of consciousness. This is the centre from which the man radiates: it begets all and explains all. He may be defined as an experiment made by nature in the raising of the single perception or impression to a hitherto unimaginable value." And he goes on to quote Emerson's own words to the same effect: "A single thought has no limit to its value." "A rush of thoughts . . . the only conceivable prosperity." "A man's whole possibility is contained in that habitual first look which he casts on all objects."

Without for the present bothering about any special meaning which he may have given to "that habitual first look," a moment's thought will convince us that Emerson's idea is by no means new. In the first place, it has always been implied in the inspiration of the poet. A poem is always "a moment's monument." And in the second place, the principle is bound up with that suspicion of logical processes that mystic and poet have always harboured, and with the corollary faith in intuition or instinctive vision and insight which has always been the mark equally of the mystical and the poetic mind. "To see the thing as in itself it really is" is possible, according to some teachers, only to the

reasoning mind, which strips off layer after layer of feeling, custom, tradition, "imaginations as one would," and the like, to get down to the "ultimate onion." But, according to others, it is possible only to the clear vision, unvitiated and unstultified, the ingenuous, fresh, and unswerving eye of the imagination or, if we please, the spirit. To the latter, direct and immediate vision is all in all; and mediate and deferred vision is at least dubious.

All sorts of men have hovered about this doctrine or, if you are sceptical, this notion. It underlies such counsel as that "unless ye become as little children, ye shall not see God," and all the various disciplines of contemplation and meditation of all the mystics of the world; but it also underlies the artist's intensest preoccupation. Flaubert's theory of originality, Pater's desire to burn with a "hard, gem-like flame," and every fine aspiration of the artist to work faithful to the immediate impression, with the "eye on the object," are all in their degrees and kinds a recognition of the possibility of intuitive vision, and therefore of the importance of the "habitual first look." Anyone who turns from Emerson to Pater and even to Oscar Wilde must be struck by curious resemblances in their confrontation of life. The resemblances are not accidental: indeed, one suspects that the American influenced the two younger men more than has been recognized, and in ways that would have astonished him. If Emerson had been a hedonist or epicurean, he would no doubt have developed a theory not unlike Pater's.

But he was not an epicurean, and, although he de-

sired quite as much as Pater to burn with a hard, gem-like flame, he had different fuel in view. Neither was he a stoic. He avoids the word "duty," and says little about duty except by way of incidence or example. His worship was not of duty or beauty or truth or justice or goodness, but of an integration or composite of all these which can best be denominated virtue or, to use his own word, character.

It is important in considering the habitual first look to understand what he expected to see. Perhaps I can best express his somewhat difficult idea by reminding the reader that the look which Emerson casts is not, with all his talk about nature, primarily upon outward objects, although under its searching penetration even these, it is true, will shed their phenomenal aspects and become symbolic. Blake says that "a fool sees not the same tree that a wise man sees," and again:

> We are led to believe a lie
> When we see *with* not *through* the eye;

and Wordsworth (in a passage which Emerson early copied into his notebook):

> Whose mind is but the mind of his own eyes,
> He is a Slave; the meanest we can meet!

And it should also be remembered that, regarding facts, Emerson's curiosity was insatiable, and in the accumulation of them he was a veritable gossip—a cosmic gossip, perhaps.

Notwithstanding all this, it is still true that his interest in objects, in facts, was always concerned with their spiritual values. If I may use a pedantic psycho-

logical metaphor, for every afferent impulse that ran along his astral nerves, he was uniquely aware of the efferent response: for him every fact in the outward world had or might have a religious or spiritual counterpart, a polar or compensating fact in man. Unaccommodated man thinks that he sees a star, but forgets that in more than a figurative sense the star also sees him—that for the light coming in there must be an energy going out, and that the very existence of the star for him depends on both. This is an assumption of modern physics, and is only one more example of Emerson's anticipations.

The habitual first look will, of course, be directed and controlled by the man who casts it—by his special personality, individuality, character. Every man lays somewhere, somehow, a foundation of character on which he plays out his destiny; or, as the old aphorism has it, "character is destiny." Where he gets this foundation, whether it is innate or acquired or both, makes little difference; his ultimate philosophy or, to use Emerson's word, culture, will be built on it and shaped by it. The subliminal foundations of Emerson's character were religious. He proceeds from the assumption of Law or the Over-Soul. God *is*. For him the Over-Soul is the All, diffused through Nature, active in Man. And every habitual first look cast upon nature or man will be what it is because of the character of the man who casts it. For one man it will be literal, for another symbolic; for one material, for another spiritual. Emerson spent his life in trying to make all men look, with the eye of the imagination or intuition, for the

spiritual values that underlie the fact or appearance.

Many have striven faithfully to reduce to a system what was after all only a faith illuminated by a thousand happy analogies and symbols. In its essence, his faith was that we are spirit and that nature is the incarnation or revelation of God to us. That logic which he held in such low esteem may discover inconsistencies in his views. I have never, for example, been able to see the office of evolution in his view of life, and yet he was delighted with the doctrine of evolution and propounded it poetically long before the world had accepted it. The fact remains, notwithstanding, that his essential technique—an open-mindedness, disciplined by habit and directed by idealism—is one with that which, perhaps more than any other, has produced what we now call the modern mind.

Emerson wrote, as I have intimated, not to purvey information or ideas, but to increase sensibility. He spent his life proclaiming what he discovered, but sought no disciples. There is not a trace in him of any desire to found a sect, formulate a creed, or proselytize the world. His missionaries were all self-nominated. He lectured for years, but never condescended to ask to be believed. His "platform manner" was that of a man who speaks what appears to him true at the moment, but whose ideas are always presented at their own worth, unaccompanied by the unction of the preacher or the intimidation of the dogmatist. Upon what he said at different times the hearer could build up almost any belief, and he would have approved, because the very essence of his philosophy was that each

man must soon or late make his own religion, and even his own God.

The great service which he rendered to his own age was his reaffirmation of a spiritual universe, in place of the older theistic conception of an evil universe and an absentee God. It is an affirmation that has to be made about once a century to remind men of their nobility, and no one in the Nineteenth Century made it with such persuasiveness and such copiousness of illustration. In making it he places himself with the prophetic seers or, as he preferred to say of himself, with the poets, rather than with the philosophers or the messiahs. He always uses the word "poet" in the sense of one gifted with intuitive vision, and not in the sense of one skilled in language. In using it he commonly made no distinction between verse and prose and, indeed, often included under it the scientist, the moralist, the mystic, when these were gifted with intuitive vision or imagination.

When we ask what Emerson has for the present age, our best reply will perhaps be this: He presented an example, a representative man, who believed in the nobility of humanity, and who taught that this nobility resides in the spiritual part of us, that this spirit is divine in its origin and in its purposes, and that the recognition of spiritual purposes is possible to every man who is alert, *every day,* for the incursions of the divine and who prepares his character through courageous self-reliance to receive and profit by them. This belief is certainly not orthodoxy and only by a too liberal use of terms can it be called Christianity. His

friend, Father Taylor, the Methodist preacher to sailors, once said of him that he knew "no more of the religion of the New Testament than Balaam's ass did of the principles of Hebrew grammar." But the same Father Taylor also said, gallantly: "Well, if Emerson has gone to hell, all I can say is that the climate will speedily change, and immigration will rapidly set in. He might *think* this or that, but he *was* more like Jesus Christ than anyone I have ever known."

Although he affirmed a spiritual universe, however, he was briskly aware that man is a creature of his senses and that few men except geniuses have any instinctive perception of the world beyond the senses or at least any continuous awareness of its existence. "A genius," he says, "is a genius by the first look he casts on any object"; while, on the other hand, "the trade in our streets believes in no metaphysical causes, thinks nothing of the force which necessitated traders and a trading planet to exist."

In the essay on Montaigne, from which I have just quoted, he divides men into two classes. "Every fact," he says, "is related on one side to sensation, and on the other to morals. The game of thought is, on the appearance of one of these sides, to find the other. . . . This head and tail are called, in the language of philosophy, Infinite and Finite; Relative and Absolute; Apparent and Real; and many fine names besides. Each man is born with a predisposition to one or the other of these sides of nature; and it will easily happen that men will be found devoted to one or the other. One class has the perception of difference, and is conversant

with facts and surfaces, cities and persons, and the bringing of certain things to pass—men of talent and action. Another class have the perception of identity, and are men of faith and philosophy, men of genius." This is, of course, only another way of putting the old saying that every man is born either a Platonist or an Aristotelian; but the idea is basic with him.

"The game of thought is, on the appearance of one of these sides, to find the other": throughout life he played the game, and his doing so has more than anything else kept him alive to posterity—which, by the way, is exactly what he says of Plato. It is this that makes his idealism so intimate and homely, his skepticism so lofty. "What is impossible," says Mr. Santayana, in a passage which I have quoted elsewhere, "is to be a transcendentalist 'all round.' . . . The art of mysticism is to be mystical in spots." Few men have exemplified this discretion better than Emerson. If he had not been a mystic, he certainly would have been a skeptic of the stripe of Montaigne, whom he loved, and he always had a frank admiration for an honest Sadducee. But although a mystic, of sorts, he refused to confine his oscillations to the mystical plane, but swung down and up, up and down, between the two worlds, with almost the regularity of a pendulum. In the essay on Montaigne he warns against an intemperate addiction to either the Relative or the Absolute. Of both the idealists and the materialists he says, "each of these riders drives too fast."

Persistent in his imaging of life is the figure of a sphere. Man is polar, his life consists of two hemi-

spheres, and each is completed only by the other. Speculation is tested by experience, experience weighed by the ideal. Hence arises the relativity of his teaching, which has puzzled many. "The philosophy we want is one of fluxions and mobility. The Spartan and Stoic schemes are too stiff and stark for our occasion. A theory of St. John, and of non-resistance, seems, on the other hand, too thin and aërial." Relativity helps Emerson to understand the high-minded sceptic. At the same time, the skeptic is by nature a doubter, and he was not a doubter.

At the end of the same essay, in a revealing passage, he girds up his loins to combat the various forms of doubt or negation. Of materialism he disposes succinctly: "I know the quadruped opinion will not prevail. 'Tis of no importance what bats and oxen think." And of cynicism or levity of intellect, though he finds it more insidious, he takes but little more account: "I confess it is not very affecting to my imagination; for it seems to concern the shattering of baby-houses and crockery-shops. What flutters the Church of Rome, or of England, or of Geneva, or of Boston, may yet be very far from touching any principle of faith." Instability of belief, too, and change of mood carry their own cure. Give them time, and the larger issues will appear. But a real and formidable doubt menaces men when they face fate, destiny, luck, fortune, and know that the "laws of the world do not always befriend, but often hurt and crush us." "We have too little power of resistance against this ferocity which champs us up. What front can we make against these unavoidable,

victorious, maleficent forces? What can I do against the influence of Race, in my history? What can I do against hereditary and constitutional habits; against scrofula, lymph, impotence? against climate, against barbarism, in my country? I can reason down or deny everything, except this perpetual Belly: feed he must and will, and I cannot make him respectable."

These last sentences prove that he was entirely aware of the "problem of evil." But a still more terrible doubt than even this is the doubt of the illusionists that man's sense of freedom is the last illusion and the most terrible of ironies. This is of course the central idea of Hardy's pessimism. Emerson finds that the "astonishment of life is the absence of any appearance of reconciliation between the theory and practice of life. . . . If we compute it in time, we may, in fifty years, have half a dozen reasonable hours. So vast is the disproportion between the sky of law and the pismire performance under it! . . . And shall I add as one juggle of this enchantment, the stunning non-intercourse law which makes coöperation impossible? . . . Men are strangely mistimed and misapplied; and the excellence of each is an inflamed individualism which separates him more."

I have thought it well to quote thus fully one of the most vigorous of his essays, partly because it seems to have attracted too little attention, and partly because it prepares the way for his affirmation or Everlasting Yea.

It is this. "Belief consists in accepting the affirmations of the soul." And his soul affirms that there is a

moral design in the universe. "The final solution in which skepticism is lost, is in the moral sentiment, which never forfeits its supremacy. All moods may safely be tried, and their weight allowed to all objections: the moral sentiment as easily outweighs them all, as any one. This is the drop which balances the sea. I play with the miscellany of facts, and take those superficial views which we call scepticism; but I know that they will presently appear to me in that order which makes scepticism impossible. A man of thought must feel the thought which is parent of the universe. . . . This faith avails to the whole emergency of life and objects. The world is saturated with deity and law. He"—the man of thought—"is content with just and unjust, with sots and fools, with the triumph of folly and fraud. He can behold with serenity the yawning gulf between the ambition of man and his power of performance, between the demand and supply of power, which makes the tragedy of all souls. . . . The incompetency of power is the universal grief of young and ardent minds. They accuse the divine Power of a certain parsimony. It has shown the heaven and earth to every child and filled him with a desire for the whole. . . . Then for the satisfaction—to each man is administered a single drop, a bead of dew of vital power, *per day*—a cup as large as space, and one drop of the water of life in it. . . . In every house, in the heart of each maiden and of each boy, in the soul of the soaring saint, this chasm is found—between the largest promise of ideal power, and the shabby experience."

The secret of life is, then, to take the day's dole and make the most of it. Past and future are beyond our control, but the present is not, and its opportunities are infinite. It is one of his favourite doctrines, as it was one of Carlyle's, that "eternity is *here* and *now*." But in this context he is concerned with other generalizations. "The expansive nature of truth," he goes on, "comes to our succour, elastic, not to be surrounded. Man helps himself by larger generalizations. The lesson of life is practically to generalize; to believe what the years and the centuries say, against the hours; to resist the usurpation of particulars; to penetrate to the catholic sense. Things seem to say one thing, and say the reverse. The appearance is immoral; the result is moral. Things seem to tend downward, to justify despondency, to promote rogues, to defeat the just; and by knaves as by martyrs the just cause is carried forward. Although knaves win in every political struggle, although society seems to be delivered over from the hands of one set of criminals into the hands of another set of criminals, as fast as the government is changed, and the march of civilization is a train of felonies—yet, general ends are somehow answered. We see, now, events forced on which seem to retard or retrograde the civility of ages. But the world-spirit is a good swimmer, and storms and waves cannot drown him. He snaps his fingers at laws: and so, throughout history, heaven seems to affect low and poor means. Through the years and the centuries, through evil agents, through toys and atoms, a great and beneficent tendency irresistibly streams.

"Let a man learn to look for the permanent in the mutable and fleeting; let him learn to bear the disappearance of things he was wont to reverence without losing his reverence; let him learn that he is here, not to work but to be worked upon; and that, though abyss open under abyss, and opinion displace opinion, all are at last contained in the Eternal Cause:

" 'If my bark sink, 'tis to another sea.' "

One may say that the final skepticism of which he says nothing is, whether any tendency *is* discernible through the ages, and whether what is called progress may not be merely one more illusion. But it remained to our age to think up that doubt and gravely to defend it. It does not appear on his horizon. Whatever we may think of his affirmation, however, we can scarcely deny that it is heroic, as heroic as, "Though he slay me, yet will I trust him."

I have thought it worth the while to assemble here, as coherently as I could, Emerson's main ideas, even though I know that for many readers they may not seem the best reason for reading him. Many persons—especially young persons—will want to know what he believed in general. But many others will care more for what he believed in particular; and he has immense riches for those who enjoy stimulating views and provocative remarks on a variety of subjects. As has recently been said of Thoreau, it may be that Emerson will live as a man of letters who united to a shrewdly observant eye and sensitive mind a remarkable faculty of expression. It is his epigrammatic vigour that has

made him so quotable, and there is some irony in the reflection that a man who always elevated the subject above the word may be remembered because of his skill in words. Others have said what he said, but no one has said it in his way. He possessed what appears to be the only infallible preservative of abstract writing—style.

Of Emerson the skeptic, using the word in the sense he uses, in speaking of Montaigne, or, as we should say, the realist, Professor Charles A. Beard has recently, in *The Rise of American Civilization,* declared that

> no one in his time understood better than he the intimate relation of property to politics. "We might as wisely reprove the east wind, or the frost," he calmly remarked in his essay on Politics, "as a political party, whose members for the most part could give no account of their position but stand for the defense of those interests in which they find themselves. . . . Ordinarily, our parties are parties of circumstances and not of principle; as, the planting interests in conflict with the commercial; the party of capitalists and that of operatives."

He believed that the conservatives were "timid and merely defensive of property," and that the philosopher, the poet, the religious man will of course cast his vote with the progressives. But he nevertheless looked upon the popular party with distrust, as selfish in its aims, low-minded, and lacking in broad and long views.

I have in a later chapter traced his part in the abolition movement. Concerning education, he said that it was in the hands of the trading and commercial classes, and concerning religion, that it was almost completely institutionalized. Such institutions "have already ac-

quired a market value as conservators of property." His forthright speaking on the subject of churches filled the orthodox with horror. He foresaw the revolution that was to be wrought in social thinking by the new science and the effect that an evolutionary philosophy was to have upon every department of human life. The publication of the *Origin of Species,* in 1859, caused him to retract or alter nothing that he had been saying for thirty years. And he prophesied that the new doctrine would strike at the very roots of the old religious dogma: "The narrow sectarian cannot read astronomy with impunity. The creeds of his church shrivel like dried leaves at the door of his church." "Nothing," says Professor Beard, "silenced him, no institutional fear."

In politics, he feared only tyranny, and he was once more in advance of his time in detecting the tyranny that lies as a menace at the heart of pure democracy—the tyranny of the mob. Mr. Chapman has said that

> while the radicals of Europe were revolting in 1848 against the abuses of a tyranny whose roots were in feudalism, Emerson, the great radical of America, the arch-radical of the world, was revolting against the evils whose roots were in universal suffrage. By showing the identity in essence of all tyranny, and by bringing back the attention of political thinkers to its starting-point, the value of human character, he has advanced the political thought of the world by one step. He has pointed out for us in this country to what end our efforts must be bent.

Read in youth, Emerson influences the individual life like the objects and forces of nature. He is an environment. The boy, grown man, forgets anything in particular that he read in him, but finds, if he return

to him at middle age, that he has all along been living by his principles. It may be, of course, that he discovers that he has been recalcitrant to them. It is easy to convince himself that Emerson has not told the whole story, that there are gulfs of terror in life and nature that Emerson never gazed into. But in the end, he is disarmed by the poet-seer himself, who has anticipated every objection. "Do not set the least value on what I do, nor the least discredit on what I do not, as if I pretended to settle anything as true or false. I unsettle all things. No facts to me are sacred; none are profane; I simply experiment, an endless seeker, with no Past at my back. . . . Why should we import rags and relics into the new hour? . . . Nothing is secure but life, transition, the energizing spirit. No love can be bound by oath or covenant to secure it against a higher love. No truth so sublime but it may be trivial to-morrow in the light of new thoughts. People wish to be settled: only as far as they are unsettled is there any hope for them."

CHAPTER ONE

THE CHILD

ALTHOUGH the records of Emerson's childhood are not abundant, it is easy to build up, from the hints which he and his friends vouchsafed, a fairly comprehensive picture of his home and the family life that flourished there. As is generally true of great men, the mere facts of chronology seem but a faint index of what he then was and was to be, while all that no one thought of recording but that can be guessed, the aura or atmosphere which surrounded his childhood, is found to be prophetic of much that we discover in the grown man.

It is only natural that, in a city where genealogy shares with weather the honour of being the most engrossing of studies, a great deal should have been made of his ancestry. His forefathers, it is true, numbered one courageous pioneer and one Revolutionary hero and, from the first who came to this country, they were all clergymen—men perhaps more notable for firmness of will than for brilliancy of mind. There was none among them who showed the marks of genius. And this is not surprising, because it is a quality of genius to be sporadic—a fact which genealogical enthusiasts seem seldom to have recognized. If a person, unacquainted with young Ralph but well aware of the his-

tory of the Emerson family, had tried to prophesy what the boy would become, he would never have thought of foretelling that here was one who would lead a life not of study but of speculation, not of practical good deeds but of daring intellection. Ralph inherited traditions, of course, but so did his father and brothers; and among all of his family there was only one who showed signs of that sudden and disconcerting originality which we call genius. This was his father's sister, that Aunt Mary Moody Emerson to whom he owed so much and to whom in after life he paid so many tributes.

The second of five brothers, Ralph was born on May 25, 1803, in the parish house of the First Church (Unitarian) of Boston. His father, William Emerson, was minister of the church. His mother, whose maiden name was Ruth Haskins, is described by her grandson as "a lady of serene sweetness and courage." Of his father little is told except that he was a man of liberal views, studious, humorous, and brave. One sentence of his that has been much quoted may be taken as a concise description of the condition of his family during his life and, even more accurately, after his death: "We are poor and cold, and have little meal, and little wood, and little meat, but, thank God, courage enough." He died when Ralph was eight years old, leaving his wife almost penniless and with the care of the five boys, William, Ralph Waldo, Edward Bliss, Robert Bulkeley, and Charles Chauncey, of whom the eldest was ten. Mrs. Emerson's serenity and courage were to be amply demonstrated.

A hundred and twenty years ago Boston was still a little city that hugged the water front, and all of it that is now most noisy and congested enjoyed an almost rural calm. William Emerson's parsonage occupied a site on which now stands a great department store, and Ralph drove his mother's cow to pasture along what are now the busiest streets of the city. After the death of her husband, Mrs. Emerson (or Madame, as she seems to have been called) opened a select boarding house and, though the records of her venture are few, we may be sure that the house was eminently quiet, orderly, and refined. Ralph, years afterward, in one of his letters to Carlyle, speaks of his mother as "whitest and mildest, most conservative of ladies, whose only exception to her universal preference for old things is her son," and such a woman must have shed a perpetual balm of peace over her household. The boys might have succumbed to her rather negative virtues if other women had not taken care that they should not, and if traditions of intellectual ambition had not been hereditary in the family.

Coventry Patmore, who had but slight sympathy for Emerson's special kind of idealism, considers Emerson's childhood as not only abnormal but as the source of nearly everything he objects to in his philosophy. He says:

Dr. W. H. Furness writes of Emerson: "We were babies and schoolfellows together. I don't think he ever engaged in boy's play. . . . I can as little remember when he was not literary in his pursuits as when I first made his acquaintance." Indeed, "orating" was in Emerson's blood. Nearly all his known ancestors and relatives seem to have been "ministers" of some denomination or

other. His school-days—though he never became a scholar in any department of learning—began before he was three years old. His father complains of the baby of two years and odd months—"Ralph does not read very well yet"; and during all the rest of his youth Dr. Furness says that he grew up under "the pressure of I know not how many literary atmospheres." Add to this the fact that his father and mother and his aunt—who was the chief guide of his nonage—were persons who seemed to think that love could be manifested only by severe duty, and rarely showed him any signs of the weaknesses of "affection," and we have as bad a bringing-up for a moral, philosophical, and religious teacher as could well have been devised.[1]

Such an opinion is worth quoting because it raises a question that must occur to all students of Emerson, whether his childhood and youth set the key of his life in the right or wrong scale. Patmore thinks that a certain coldness, a certain want of warm human contacts, which he discerns in Emerson's writings, is to be traced to early impulsions; but Emerson himself looked back upon his childhood with pleasure and gratitude. The family life of the five brothers was unaffectedly cheery, loving, and forebearing, all of the boys having their appointed tasks. Ralph knew what it was to wash and dry dishes, shovel snow, fetch wood, weed the garden, drive the cow, all of which homely work was valuable experience for a budding philosopher or poet. We read of weekly spelling matches, in which Ralph felt that his brothers sometimes cheated, of the writing and reading of much verse, of the memorizing of orations. Reverence for literature, scholarship, and oratory was a matter of course among the Emersons, as was the practice of thrift. For the widow, despite the perpetual

[1] An essay on Emerson in *Principle in Art*, 1889.

kindness of friends, knew periods of real poverty, during which the boys were hungry and were forced to wear clothes that may have hurt their pride. One winter Ralph and Edward had to wear the same coat to school on alternate days. It is no wonder if the former, in his lecture on *Domestic Life,* has drawn a picture of a household in which the "angels are Toil and Want, Truth and Mutual Faith."[1]

The passage is so significant of Emerson's faith in the family and the home that it deserves quotation at length. "Who has not seen," he says, "and who can see unmoved, under a low roof, the eager, blushing boys discharging as they can their household chores, and hastening into the sitting room to the study of to-morrow's lesson, yet stealing time to read one chapter more of the novel hardly smuggled into the tolerance of father and mother—atoning for the same by some pages of Plutarch or Goldsmith; the warm sympathy with which they kindle each other in schoolyard or in the barn or woodshed with scraps of poetry or song, with praises of the last oration, or mimicry of the orator; the youthful criticism, on Sunday, of the sermons; the school declamation faithfully rehearsed at home, sometimes to the fatigue, sometimes to the admiration of sisters; the first solitary joys of literary vanity, when the translation or the theme has been completed, sitting alone near the top of the house; the cautious comparison of the attractive advertisement of the arrival of Macready, Booth, or Kemble, or of the discourse of a well-known speaker, with the expense

[1]Included in *Society and Solitude,* published 1870.

of the entertainment; the affectionate delight with which they greet the return of each after the early separations which school or business require; the foresight with which, during such absences, they hive the honey which opportunity offers, for the ear and imagination of the others; and the unrestrained glee with which they disburden themselves of their early mental treasures when the holidays bring them together again? What is the hoop that holds them staunch? It is the iron hand of poverty, of necessity, of austerity, which, excluding them from the sensual enjoyments which make other boys too early old, has directed their activity in safe and right channels and made them, despite themselves, reverers of the grand, the beautiful, and the good. Ah! short-sighted students of books, of Nature, and of man! too happy, could they know their advantages. They pine for freedom from the mild parental yoke; they sigh for fine clothes, for rides, for the theatre and premature freedom and dissipation, which others possess. Woe to them if their wishes were crowned! The angels that dwell with them and are weaving the laurels of life for their youthful brows, are Toil and Want, Truth and Mutual Faith."

Other passages, almost as eloquent, bear witness to Emerson's conviction that his boyhood had been lucky, and the testimony of friends is in like vein. Of the four brothers one, Robert, was a backward though loving child. The other three all possessed ingratiating qualities. William as a boy is described by a relative as "the best reader, and with the sweetest voice I ever heard, and a pleasant talker," and his life was

one of heroic devotion to the family and his studies. Edward the same relative speaks of as "the most modest and genial, the most beautiful and graceful speaker, a universal favourite"; and of Charles as "bright and ready, full of sense, ambitious of distinction, and capable of it." Dr. Frothingham is reported to have examined the form of Ralph's head one day and said: "If you are good, it is no thanks to you"; and Aunt Mary declared that the Emerson boys were "born to be educated."

Emerson speaks, in the passage quoted above, of sisters listening to their brothers' declamations, but the absence of sisters in the family and of girls in the Emerson circle may be held to account for the social shyness which he bewails in himself in the earlier Journals, as the unusual happiness of his household may suggest the reason why he always held a somewhat poetical and idealistic opinion of boys in general. If he was never able to give sufficient prominence in his philosophy to the Old Adam or the Original Sin about which his Puritan ancestors had no doubts, the reason is clearly to be sought in his youthful love and faith. He may have endured mild poverty, but he did not endure injustice. Whatever his physical sufferings may have been, and they were not severe, sympathy was never lacking. And in all his family unbridled passion and the coarser vices hardly existed. He lived in an aseptic atmosphere, where being good was merely natural.

As for his schooling, little need be said, because, like most thoughtful boys, he attended his set scholastic

duties with as little inconvenience as possible and as little agitation of the gray matter. We know that he surreptitiously read books that were contraband, that his recitation of verse was impressive, and that his school compositions were "graceful." After early attendance at dame schools, he went first to a tutor, two of his fellow pupils, Samuel Bradford and W. H. Furness, becoming his lifelong friends; and, at the age of ten, he entered the Boston Latin School. He is reported to have played truant from a private writing school, spending his fugitive hours playing on the Common. When school was over for the day, he went in swimming in the harbour, followed the fire engines, viewed processions of the militia or of boys from an orphanage, admired the town crier or visited the ropewalks. At Deacon White's store he was sometimes put upon a barrel and incited to deliver passages from Milton or Campbell. The teachers who influenced him most, whether for good or ill, were undoubtedly Aunt Mary Moody, who made him read the best books, showing no mercy for his tender years, and Sarah Bradford, who "corresponded with him about every book and lesson, and revised his translations." Aunt Mary also encouraged him to write verse, and it is interesting to record that his verse as a boy, unlike his verse as a man, was facile and flowing. He and his brothers were passionate admirers of good oratory, their hero at the time being Edward Everett, and eloquence remained a subject of enthusiasm until after his graduation from college. Indeed, it may be said that his youth was passed in the closing period of the

older oratory, when "orating," as Patmore calls it, was not only "in the Emerson blood," but in everybody's. Perhaps Emerson and Lincoln were, more than anyone else, responsible for its passing.

Surveying his first fourteen years, we form a picture of a quiet-mannered little boy with very bright eyes, cheerful and friendly, even given to fits of wild merriment, and yet temperamentally reserved and happiest in solitude. He says that he took his staid bearing from his father. He records in his Journal that when he was thirteen years old an uncle asked him why it was that boys did not like him while older people did, and he drily adds that now, when he is thirty-five, the situation is exactly reversed, because older people are suspicious of him, but youth understands him perfectly. As a child and even as a young man he impressed no one as remarkable, his studious and scholastically brilliant brothers dimming his as yet ineffectual beams, but he did have some visitings of speculation. He tells how when a child, in the pew on Sundays, he amused himself with saying over common words, such as "black," "white," "board," etc., twenty or thirty times, "until the words lost all meaning and fixedness," and he began to doubt which was the right name for the thing, until he saw "that neither had any natural relation, but were all arbitrary." It was, he says, a child's first lesson in Idealism.

One suspects that the Emerson brothers may have been looked upon by average little boys of the neighbourhood as somewhat goody-goody, perhaps because they used English of adult choiceness and correctness

and because of the sobriety of their manners. Neither must it be forgotten that the Emersons, whatever their dress and their simplicity of living, belonged to the Boston "aristocracy."

In the background of Ralph's childhood are ever present two or three figures who exercised an influence that can hardly be overestimated. Sarah Bradford is described by Moncure Conway as "as fine a Greek scholar as America has produced, an accomplished mathematician, and possessed of scientific attainments of which professors were glad to ask aid," and as "not less admirable for her simplicity and womanly charm than for her scholarship." Other biographers, however, say little of her, and I think that her influence may be traced more clearly in the careers of the scholarly William and Edward than in that of the somewhat dreamy Ralph. Certainly it was in Aunt Mary Moody that Ralph found a kindred if at times uncomfortable soul mate. This remarkable woman was born in 1775 —her best-known witticism is that she was in arms at Concord Fight—and, in 1855, when she was eighty, Thoreau called her "the youngest person in Concord—the most apprehensive of a genuine thought, earnest to know your inner life, most stimulating society; and exceedingly witty withal." She was terrifying to many because of her sardonic humour and blunt speech; but those who came to know her soon learned that her fiery and unsparing honesty veiled a warm heart. If anyone should ever write a book on the maiden aunts who have influenced great men, Emerson's Aunt Mary would deserve one of the longest chapters.

In 1869, Emerson read before the Woman's Club of Boston a biography of his aunt,[1] in which he paints an affectionate but amusing picture of her, mainly by quoting from her letters. "She had," he says, "the misfortune of spinning with a greater velocity than the other tops. She would tear into the chaise or out of it, into the house or out of it, into the conversation, into the thought, into the character of the stranger—disdaining all the graduations by which her fellows time their steps: and though she might do very happily on a planet where others moved with like velocity, she was offended here by the phlegm of all her fellow creatures, and disgusted them by her impatience. She could keep step with no human being. . . . Our Delphian was fantastic enough, Heaven knows, yet could always be tamed by large and sincere conversation. Was there thought and eloquence, she would listen like a child. Her aspiration and prayer would begin, and the whim and petulance in which by diseased habit she had grown to indulge without suspecting it, was burned up in the glow of her pure and poetic spirit, which dearly loved the Infinite." And he ends with the following words: "She gave high counsels. It was the privilege of certain boys to have this immeasurably high standard indicated in their childhood; a blessing which nothing else in education could supply."

Perhaps, though he does not mention it, he learned something of literary style from Aunt Mary. His few surviving childhood letters to her are irreproachable in diction and punctuation and are couched in a style

[1]Given in *Lectures and Biographical Sketches.*

that would be laudable nowadays in a youth of twenty. When he wrote her he always put his best foot forward, and, in his later letters, one seems to detect some self-conscious effort to cerebrate as boldly as she and to use words as freshly. Entirely self-educated, she used words with the homely vigour that he loved so much. One has to suppress the impulse to cover pages with examples of what Mr. Cabot calls her "sibylline inspirations"; but one or two will suffice. "I fancy," she says, "that I am emptied and peeled to carry some seed to the ignorant, which no idler wind can so well dispense"; and, "Your Muse is mean because the breath of fashion has not puffed her; you are not inspired at heart because you are the nursling of surrounding circumstances"; and in a letter of the same year (1827) from him to her, we find such sentences as: "The beam of the balance trembles, to be sure, but settles always on the right side. For otherwise all things look silly. The sun is silly, and the connection of beings and worlds such mad nonsense." The trick of style is the same, but perhaps I only imagine that he learned it from her.

Perhaps the best summary of Aunt Mary's indomitable spirit is that of her nephew, C. C. Emerson:

> As by seeing a high tragedy, reading a true poem, or a novel like *Corinne,* so, by society with her, one's mind is electrified and purged. She is no statute-book of practical commandments, nor orderly digest of any system of philosophy, divine or human, but a Bible, miscellaneous in its parts, but one in its spirit, wherein sentences of condemnation, promises and covenants of love that make foolish the wisdom of the world with the power of God.

A creature of fire and air, paradoxical, certainly eccentric, but holding up before the Emerson boys a heroic ideal of honesty, self-dependence, and courage, scolding them soundly if they proved false to it, she would have proved a veritable gadfly to spirits less ambitious than they. Her letters from a remote farm in Maine or from some one of her innumerable boarding places blew in like Delphian oracles, almost gnomic in style, but always perfectly comprehensible in their purpose. She was, people used to say, "very impatient with the faults of the good," because she was consumed with a lofty hatred of waste—waste of time, opportunity, or brains.

One other relative who should be mentioned as influencing Emerson's boyhood is Dr. Ezra Ripley, his step-grandfather, pastor of the Concord Church, and for years occupant of the Old Manse made famous by Hawthorne. An amusing sketch of Dr. Ripley was read by Emerson to the Social Circle of Concord and can be found in the same volume as that of Aunt Mary. Dr. Ripley seems always to have appealed to his sense of the ridiculous, even though he was fully aware of the good pastor's virtues and retained a lifelong gratitude for his kindness. "Dr. Ripley," he notes in his Journal for 1834, "prays for rain with great explicitness on Sunday, and on Monday the showers fell. When I spoke of the speed with which his prayers were answered, the good man looked modest." "His partiality for ladies," he says in another place, "was always strong, and was by no means abated by time. He claimed the privilege of years, was much addicted

to kissing; spared neither maid, wife, nor widow, and, as a lady thus favoured remarked to me, 'seemed as if he was going to make a meal of you.' " Narrow, opinionated, credulous, the doctor was withal "so kind and sympathetic, his character so transparent, and his merits so intelligible to all observers, that he was justly appreciated in the community." His kindness to Madam Emerson during the period when she most sorely needed help was tireless, and the boys spent a great deal of time at the Old Manse and on the adjoining farm, working in the fields or riding with him on his pastoral rounds. It was the memory of these childhood visits that determined Emerson in settling in Concord in 1835. Their value to a young poet, initiating him as they did at the most impressionable age into the fascinations of farm, garden, orchard, field, and woodland, does not need to be emphasized.

CHAPTER TWO

HARVARD

EMERSON entered Harvard College in 1817 at the age of fourteen and was graduated in 1821.

The Harvard of that day was still only a nucleolus of the gigantic institution that now occupies the "Yard" and the surrounding territory, and was still administered in the paternal spirit of a select academy, although, under the presidency of Dr. Kirkland, it was entering upon a renascence in which such men as Edward Everett in Greek, George Ticknor in Modern Languages, Levi Frisbie in Moral Philosophy, and Edward Channing in Rhetoric and Oratory, were to be prominent. Nevertheless, a theological flavour still permeated the instruction, and the boys—and they were only boys in years—were protected as far as possible from temptation, especially the temptations of the theatre. Josiah Quincey, who was a classmate of Emerson's, records that clandestine visits to Boston, wild runs with the fire-engine, and mildly convivial parties supplied the main outlets for their sporting impulses.

The circumstances of his family made it necessary that Ralph (or Waldo, as he was now usually called) should contribute to the household budget in every practicable way. The young Emersons seem never to

have lacked opportunities to raise funds for their education, and no doubt the success of William as a student helped to smooth the way of his brother. Ralph was aided by the office of "president's freshman," or messenger; he waited on table in the college commons; he was the recipient of occasional scholarships and prizes. The two appointments as messenger and waiter paid about three fourths of his board and lodging, and, during his sophomore year, his mother having moved to Cambridge, he lived at home; but throughout his course and for some years afterward he was harassed by the necessities of the family and by his own precarious health. Toward the close of his residence a weakness of the lungs as well as trouble with his eyes and some visitations of rheumatism, combined with the constant realization of the needs of his mother and the demands of self-help, constituted a burden which would seem sufficient to account for his lack of eminence in his studies. But more than any of these, his temperament must be given the blame, or credit, for his moderate success as a scholar. Compared with his brothers, William and Edward, he may have been a disappointment to his well-wishers; for, though he was distinctly poor only in mathematics, he shone only by fits and starts in his other subjects. As is to be expected, his best subjects were rhetoric and oratory, but even here he did not show sufficient brilliancy to attract the special attention of his classmates and instructors. He competed for both the Bowdoin and Boylston prizes, taking first in one and second in the other. In the Boylston, Josiah Quincey took first prize,

and in his amusing journal, *Figures of the Past,* recently republished, he honestly records the fact that he at the time had no idea that his chief competitor was a genius; quaintly adding that he would have been gratified if the astute judges who awarded him the first prize had announced at the same time that the recipient of the second was ultimately to be known as the most eminent man in America. There is a touch of pathos in the fact that the thirty dollars which Ralph received on this occasion he had hoped to spend on a new shawl for his mother but was forced to use the money to buy food for the family.

But it would be a mistake to convey the idea that his college years were sad. Although one of his inveterate convictions was always the value of solitude, he was by temperament quietly sociable and was always friendly and well liked.

His recorded life really begins in his junior year, when he began to keep those journals or commonplace books, in which for fifty years he was to record his beliefs, observations, and speculations. The *Journals* which, edited by his son, have been published in ten volumes,[1] contain very little objective biography, for he seldom entered in them any incidents of his outer life unless they suggested a reflection or generalization; but as a picture of his mind and as a history of his intellectual and spiritual growth they furnish one of the most remarkable records in literature. The earliest

[1]An admirable selection of the Journal entries has recently been made by Bliss Perry and published under the title of *The Heart of Emerson's Journals.* It is a book of quite inestimable interest.

entry in the published journals is dated January, 1820. He was then not quite seventeen. The sections devoted to his college years consist chiefly of notes to be used in themes and dissertations, and minutes of the meetings of a society, the Pythologian, with only occasional references to his professors or friends. A few snatches of original verse appear. It is facile and thin.

In an early lecture Emerson gave the following advice to young scholars: "1. *Sit alone:* in your arrangements for residence see you have a chamber to yourself, though you sell your overcoat and wear a blanket. 2. *Keep a journal:* pay so much honour to the visits of Truth to your mind as to record them." He used to call his journal his "savings-bank," in which he deposited fugitive ideas to breed interest. His reading was always "creative": he called it "reading for lustres," by which he meant the light-flashes that are the fruit of the impact of two minds; for he valued a book very little for the ideas it imparted, but greatly for the ideas it roused. He considered that the time spent in the library reading what he pleased was more profitably occupied than the time spent at lectures, and years after his graduation he records his conviction: "I will trust my instincts. . . . I was the true philosopher in college, and Mr. Farrar and Mr. Hedge and Dr. Ware the false. Yet what seemed to me then less probable?" By "true philosopher" he meant seeker after truth or youthful Socrates, who followed his intuitions, rather than student of systems of morals and metaphysics. He names as favourite authors Chaucer, Montaigne, Plutarch, and Plato, and his entries in-

dicate his love of the Elizabethans and the Seventeenth Century writers. For a time he is offended by the grossness of certain parts of Shakespeare, but this distaste rapidly disappears and a profound admiration takes its place. Though only a passable student of Greek and Latin, he reveres the classics as literature.

Externally his life at Harvard evinces an odd passivity, as if he were floating, taking what came; often lonely, but always ready to play his part in the social life of his fellows. He participated in his second year in a student rebellion, even to the extent of absenting himself from college; was not averse to conviviality, though he found that wine affected him adversely; and was a member of a jocose organization, the Conventicle, in which ecclesiastical titles and dignities were travestied. But perhaps the two series of entries of most interest are those concerning a mild infatuation for a fellow student, Martin Gay, and those concerning the meetings of the Pythologian.

Martin Gay, who was of the same age as Ralph though two classes below him, became in time a successful and respected physician in Boston and, until his premature death in 1850, must often have moved in the same circles, but there is no indication that they were ever more than the most distant acquaintances. Just why, for a year or so, out of all his college mates, Ralph singled Gay and concerning him alone wrote entries and even poems, seems to have puzzled his biographers. No doubt the psychoanalytical school of biographers could explain it fully, and they are welcome to do so; but the situation is clear enough with-

out Freudian help. The fascinating sophomore was know as "cool Gay"; he was genial but well poised, sociable but socially dominant, and Ralph speaks of his "cool blue eye." A crude profile sketch which Ralph drew of him in the Journal for 1821 suggests a youth of strong physical build, well-shaped head, rather fully developed in the occipital region, powerful nose, and somewhat aggressive mouth and chin—just the sort of young man, in short, to attract the shy intellectualist, who no doubt saw in him much to admire and even envy. There are probably few studious men who cannot remember some secret attraction which they felt in their younger days for a smart, aggressive, and athletic fellow, who seemed to embody an ideal. That Ralph, with his congenital shrewdness, suspected that his mental picture of Gay was a fancy one is indicated by the fact that he never sought his acquaintance. In October of 1821 he says of him, "We have had already two or three long profound stares at each other. Be it wise or superstitious, I must know him"; but, in November, "My opinion of —— was strangely lowered by hearing that he was 'proverbially idle.' This was redeemed by learning that he was a 'superior man.' " And finally, in the following year, he writes, "The anecdote which I accidentally heard of —— shows him more like his neighbours than I should wish him to be. I shall have to throw him up, after all, as a cheat of fancy." All of which, though it has elements of comedy, has also elements of pathos. It is evident that Ralph found no one among his comrades who fulfilled his ideals and that he invented a friend

who should. That the basis of the idealization of Gay is to be sought in the latter's social competency is further suggested by the fact that Ralph greatly admired his room mate, John Gaillard Keith Gourdin,[1] of Charleston, South Carolina.

John Gourdin and his brother Robert were, according to Dr. O. W. Holmes, "the reigning college *élégans* of their day." "Their swallow-tail coats tapered to an arrow-point angle," he says, "and the prints of their little delicate calf-skin boots in the snow were objects of great admiration"; and he expresses wonder that Emerson and the "showy, fascinating John Gourdin" should ever have been room mates. But there really is no great mystery in the mutual attraction of opposites. Emerson also admired the fervid and flowery oratory of the Southern students. But it is significant that he never tried to imitate either their manners or their eloquence.

Gourdin was also a member of the Pythologian, a book club, the members of which subscribed to magazines and bought books which were not in the college library, and met at irregular intervals in the room of a member to listen to essays and partake of refreshments. The minutes recorded in Emerson's Journals are couched in a style of burlesque solemnity, proving that undergraduate humour has changed very little in a century. We find "Brother" Emerson contributing a dissertation on the subject, "Which is the stronger passion, Love or Ambition?" Unfortunately, as we read later, "though Brother Emerson was pre-

[1]The name seems to have been pronounced Gordyne.

pared to read his Essay, . . . such was the members' desire to depart that it was found impossible to keep them together any longer. The meeting was therefore adjourned." At another meeting, "Br. Emerson next advanced, with a neat, concise and pithy comparison of country and city life, much to the edification of the Brotherhood." Finally, on May 1, 1821, the Club broke up, leaving in the hands of R. W. Emerson, Secretary, the sum of *one cent,* which he promises to "deliver on demand to the new Secretary." There seems never to have been a new secretary, but the fact that Emerson preserved the archives of the society suggests that his memories of it were pleasant.

Trifling details these, perhaps, and yet they help us to realize that his life in college was normal and even average, and that his faith in the value of solitude did not preclude his indulging often in the pleasures of society. In the privacy of his room or his favourite corner of the library, he was pondering upon such subjects as the uses of tragedy and the philosophy of Socrates, writing his dissertation for the Bowdoin prize, "On the Present State of Ethical Culture," planning poems which he never finished, and reading a multitude of the best books. In October, 1820, he writes: "To separate the soul for sublime contemplation till it has lost the sense of circumstances . . . is a recreation and a rapture of which few men can avail themselves. But this privilege, in common with other great gifts of Nature, is attainable if not inborn. It is denied altogether to three classes at least of mankind, *viz.:* the queer, the downright, and the ungainly." And

in the same year he registers his conviction that the study of the natural sciences is worthy and elevating. "One would say, Leave the matter to the beasts that are only matter, and indulge your peculiar and distinguishing faculties. But then our reason and all our mental powers are called into as active exercise in demonstrating the properties of matter as the properties of mind, and the beasts are alike incapable of both. . . . With regard then to the study of Natural Philosophy, I do not think any one study so contributes to expand the mind as our first correct notions of this science;—when we first know that the sky is not a shell but a vacant space, that the world is not still and plain, but a little globe performing, as one of a system, immense revolutions. . . ." But for the most part, the entries during his junior and senior years give little enough promise of his future, and are, in general, interesting only because he wrote them.

Upon second thought, one realizes, nevertheless, that the Journals for 1820–1821 are significant for what they omit. Excepting the minutes of the Pythologian and the veiled references to Martin Gay, there is nothing about Emerson's fellow students. Remarks on his professors are confined to one or two notes on lectures by Ticknor or Everett. Of his ambitions nothing is said except that in a moment of depression because of illness he vows to devote himself more diligently to preparing himself for the "great profession" (the ministry) which he proposes to enter. "I am," he says, "to give my soul to God and withdraw from sin and the world the idle or vicious times and thoughts I have

sacrificed to them"; but it is his only reference to the fact that he contemplates a religious career. And nowhere is there a trace that his mind ever turned to those thoughts of love and those romantic or amatory adventures that for most youths of his age are so alluring.

Some have thought that in the veins of this scion of a Puritan tree there flowed, not blood, but a celestial ichor. Certainly one feels in reading these pages that the writer was immune to the temptations of young flesh, and that even temptations of the spirit visited him rarely. Throughout his first three college years he never complained, was never sad, except when, during the winter of 1820, he was forced to eke out his resources by teaching school—an employment which at first he hated and later only endured. For the rest, his passions, if indeed he felt any, were no doubt sublimed into a hunger for knowledge and the truth. He evinced in general the same serene cheerfulness that was to be his throughout life.

In the final months before his graduation, however, when he naturally turned his thoughts toward the future, he found the prospect uncertain. "I am in no haste," he wrote, in one of his notebooks, "to engage in the difficulties and tasks of the world, for whose danger and turmoil the independence is a small reward." The fact was that he not only felt no distinct vocation, but that in the retrospect his college course seemed to have prepared him for nothing in particular.

During the last winter of his residence (1820) his records are often gloomy. He was, as we have seen,

teaching in an elementary school, and the occupation depressed him. "Here at Cambridge in my cheerless schoolroom," he writes in December; and, again, "I claim and clasp a moment's respite from this irksome school to saunter in the fields of my own wayward thought. The afternoon was gloomy and preparing snow—dull, ugly weather, but when I came out from the hot, steaming, stoved, stinking, dirty A-B spelling-school-room, I almost soared and mounted the atmosphere at breathing the free magnificent air, the noble breath of life. It was a delightful exhilaration, but it soon passed off."

In March of the next year (his graduation year), we read: "I am sick—if I should die what would become of me? We forget ourselves and our destinies in health, and the chief use of temporary sickness is to remind us of these concerns. I must improve my time better." But there really was no heart in his resolutions. At the same time his thoughts were centred upon a romance of which Richard Cœur de Lion seems to have been the hero and, it may be, upon a long poem which he hoped to be permitted to read at the graduation exercises. He was not permitted to read it, being assigned instead a part in the Colloquy—on Knox, Penn, and Wesley—in which he supported the claims of Knox against the other two reformers. He was, according to a friend, "so disgusted that he took no pains to commit to memory, and had to be greatly prompted before he had finished."

As telltale of his interests and tastes during his junior and senior years, nothing could be more inform-

ing than the list of books which he read. His son, Mr. Edward Waldo Emerson, has carefully compiled from his Journals such a list and, although it is a remarkable one for a boy of seventeen and eighteen years, there is little in it to indicate that he was reading according to any system or with any definite vocation in mind.

Of poetry he read Homer, Æschylus, Sophocles, Euripides, Aristophanes, Theocritus, Lucretius, Virgil, Horace, Shakespeare, Jonson, Beaumont and Fletcher, Massinger, Otway, Milton, Dryden, Cowper, Corneille, Racine, Pope, Scott (*Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border*), Lockhart's *Spanish Ballads, The Excursion, Thalaba,* Byron, Campbell, *Lalla Rookh,* and Bryant. Of philosophy and morals: the early Greek philosophers, Xenophon and Plato and Socrates; Epictetus and Marcus Aurelius; the *Zendavesta,* the *Novum Organum;* Hobbes, Descartes, Cudworth, Locke, Shaftsbury, Hume, Priestley, Paley, Dugald Stewart, Reid, Price (*On Morals*), Forsyth (*Principles of Moral Science*), and Bishop Hall; and the lectures of Edward Everett. Of history and biography: the Arthurian romances, De Joinville's *Chronicles,* Mosheim, Gibbon, Burke, Sismondi, and Maclaurin's *Life of Sir Isaac Newton.* Of essays and general prose: the *Apochrypha,* Montaigne, Montesquieu, Chateaubriand, Swift, Sterne, Addison, Johnson (*Lives of the Poets*), Lamb, and the *Edinburgh* and *Quarterly Reviews.* And of prose fiction: *Guy Mannering, Old Mortality,* and *The Monastery.* No doubt he read most of the foreign works in translation, and read only what interested him in all.

If we would discover what did interest him, we have only to turn to another list, also compiled by his son, of passages which he carefully transcribed from his reading into a special notebook, entitled *The Universe.* The extremely condensed list alone covers more than seven pages, and to undertake even a summary here would be too hard a task.[1] But one observation suggests itself, and that is that all but some half-dozen of the extracts are in the region of *belles lettres:* passages of poetry, character sketches, eloquent bits of prose, and humorous or picturesque descriptions. The small remainder, perhaps six out of sixty, consists of the passage concerning the poet in Milton's *Reason for Church Government,* which remained a favourite with him for years to come; a speculation on angels from Jeremy Taylor; one on human laws from Isaac Barrow; one on chance from the *Novum Organum;* a dialogue between a tyrant and a Stoic from Arrian; a note on republics from Sismondi; and two similes, both illustrating processes of thought, from the *Light of Nature,* by "Edward Search."

This attempt to get at his interests by way of his reading has not been a waste of space if it has made clear that he had been educating himself in his own way. In reading for lustres, as his phrase was, he had a constant eye for ideas and for style. Among all his books is hardly one that may be called devotional or mystical. His interest in morals, however, was genuine,

[1]Both lists are given in *Emerson's Journals: 1820–1824,* published in 1909.

much as it may have been influenced by his admiration for Everett.

Apart from books, his predilection was for long pedestrian rambles, alone or with his brothers, in nearby fields and woods. All his life he loved best to wander among trees or along watercourses, finding a special pleasure in picking berries and "other trash of the woods." As a contemplative man's recreation, picking berries is certainly one of the best, because it keeps the fingers busy and leaves the mind free. For other games, sports, and manual crafts he never showed either interest or aptitude; was, in fact, definitely clumsy; and even in so primitive a skill as weeding a flower bed was never able to achieve deftness or efficiency.

CHAPTER THREE

ADJUSTMENT

WITH his graduation, Emerson ceased to keep his Journal for about a half-year, no entries appearing between June 10, 1821, and January, 1822. During this time he found a temporary means of livelihood in his brother William's school for young ladies, and here he continued to teach for three years, the first two as assistant and the last as headmaster, during William's residence at Göttingen, whither he went to study divinity.

Concerning this second and more grateful experience in schoolmastering, Emerson spoke years afterward at a gathering of his former pupils, contrasting his own want of skill in pedagogy with the success of his brother and ascribing his deficiencies to his shyness and his lack of system. "I still recall my terrors at entering the school; my timidities at French, the infirmities of my cheek, and my occasional admiration of some of my pupils." He regretted that he had not made better use of the opportunity the classroom offered. "Now I have two regrets in regard to this school. The first is that my teaching was partial and external. I was at that time already writing every night, in my chamber, my first thoughts on morals and the beautiful laws of compensation and of individual genius, which to

observe and illustrate have given sweetness to many years of my life. I am afraid that no hint of this ever came into the school. . . . Then I should have shown . . . you[1] the poems and works of imagination I delighted in; the single passages which have made some men immortal. The sharing a joy of this kind makes teaching a liberal and delicious art. What I wonder at is that I did not read to you, and attempt to teach you to read, certain selections of Shakespeare and the poets." Some of his hearers insisted that his teaching had been all that he said it had not. The fact is, of course, that he had not liked schoolmastering and had turned from it with relief as soon as he could; and yet it is significant that he once, years afterward, confided to a friend that there had been no time in his life when he would not have accepted a professorship of rhetoric in Harvard College. The hall of philosophy in the University is now named after him.

It is interesting to note, in the passage quoted above, that thus early two of his main principles—of compensation and self-reliance—were beginning to crystallize in his mind; and it is further interesting to discover that his greatest regret was that he had not directed his teaching at the imagination of his pupils. In the very years when he was bashfully appearing before his classes of "select young ladies" in Boston, Bronson Alcott was beginning his experiments in the instruction of the infant mind at Spindle Hill, near Wolcott, Connecticut. For him, too, the appeal to the imagination was the mainspring of education. He was a born

[1]The "you" refers to his former pupils, whom he is addressing.

teacher, for whom teaching was literally a vocation, an inescapable "call," but the world was not ready to appreciate his methods. Years later, Emerson was to be his loyal defender, but at present neither man was aware of the other's existence.

A few days before his nineteenth birthday, Emerson entered in his Journal a youthful wail over his lack of accomplishment and his personal deficiencies. It would be too solemn to make much of what may be accounted only growing pains, and yet they will bear a moment's consideration. "In twelve days," he writes, "I shall be nineteen years old; which I count a miserable thing. Has any other educated person lived so many years and lost so many days? I do not say acquired so little, for by an ease of thought and certain looseness of mind I have perhaps been the subject of as many ideas as many of mine age. But mine approaching maturity is attended with a goading sense of emptiness and wasted capacity." And he proceeds to belabour himself for two pages, because his dreams of greatness show so little likelihood of fulfillment. But he ends his attempt to estimate his intellectual stature by determining to dream, to "entertain the angels," yet a little while.

But when he turns from the history of his intellect to the history of his "heart," he finds, merely, "a blank, my lord." "I have not the kind affections of a pigeon. Ungenerous and selfish, cautious and cold, I yet wish to be romantic; have not sufficient feeling to speak a natural hearty welcome to friend or stranger, and yet send abroad wishes and fancies of a friendship with a

man I never knew." He is still thinking of Martin Gay. "There is not in the whole wide Universe of God (my relations to Himself I do not understand) one being to whom I am attached with warm and entire devotion —not a being to whom I have joined fate for weal or woe, not one whose interests I have nearly and dearly at heart;—and this I say at the most susceptible age of man."

If this confession has any significance at all, except as registering a mood of depression, it is suggested by the sentence, "I have not the kind affections of a pigeon." Here he too vigorously expresses a self-criticism which we find recurring all through the earlier Journals. Like many another young man who is temperamentally reserved, he envied spontaneous heartiness of manner in others and ascribed his inability to unbend in society to a spiritual coldness, a want of genuine feeling, in himself. Since some of his critics have attributed precisely this trait to him, and since some, like Patmore, have felt that his lack of warm feelings vitiates his entire teaching, it is at least interesting to know that he was well aware of the danger that lies in the road of all spiritual travellers.

The trouble with him during these perplexed years was that he had lost all interest in the career which as a boy he had assumed was to be his. As a boy he had dreamed of being a brilliant pulpit orator who should, as Dr. Cabot says, "draw all men to himself and to religion by the splendour of his eloquence." He had now no admiration for a "personal ascendency which might lend authority to sacred truth; the leading was

all the other way, towards the renouncement of all authority and all official sacredness; and this tendency, though it had not yet gathered strength to prevail, was strong enough to prevent his entering with an assured mind upon his intended career."[1]

In this exigency, Aunt Mary counselled seclusion and a country life, and, in April, 1823, the entire family removed to Canterbury, in Roxbury, near Boston, on the site of the present Franklin Park. Here, amid the rocks and pines, he was happier, carrying on a lively correspondence with former classmates, exploring the neighbourhood with his brothers, Edward and Charles, or lying under the trees. It was here that, in 1823 or 1824, he wrote his very popular poem, "Good-bye, Proud World." As a somewhat stern valedictory to the worldliness of Boston, it was a little startling to his friends, but it was evidently purely dramatic or, as he himself called it, apocryphal. As a whole the poem is amateurish, but it is pleasingly fresh in spirit. One is most struck by a certain looseness or facility of rhythm and wording and by a lyric swing which he seldom achieved again.

"O, when I am safe in my sylvan home,
I tread on the pride of Greece and Rome;
And when I am stretched beneath the pines,
Where the evening star so holy shines,
I laugh at the lore and the pride of man,
At the sophist schools and the learned clan;

[1] *Ralph Waldo Emerson,* by James Elliot Cabot, 1887, Vol. I, p. 77. This is the standard biography.

For what are they all, in their high conceit,
When man in the bush with God may meet?"

This stanza is inscribed on a rock in Franklin Park, on what is known as Schoolmaster's Hill, with the explanation: "Near this rock, A. D. 1823–1825, was the house of Schoolmaster Ralph Waldo Emerson." Boyish as the poem is, we can agree with Professor Woodbury that "his future rings in it."

In a letter to a friend, J. B. Hill, written June 19, 1823, a passage of autobiography has considerable interest. "I commend to your especial notice the date of this epistle, which will show you that I am living in the country." The heading of the letter reads: Light Lane, Lower Canterbury, Roxbury, Massachusetts. "Here my only ejaculation is, *O fortunati nimium,* as of yore, and I teach, ay, teach in town, and then scamper out as fast as our cosset horse will bring us, to snuff the winds and cross the wild blossoms and branches of the fields. I am seeking to put myself on a footing of old acquaintance with Nature, as a poet should; but the fair divinity is somewhat shy of my advances, and I confess I cannot find myself quite as perfectly at home on the rock and in the woods as my ancient, and I might say infant, aspirations led me to expect. My aunt (of whom I think you have heard before, and who is alone among women) has spent a great part of her life in the country, is an idolater of nature, and counts but a small number who merit the privilege of dwelling among the mountains—the coarse, thrifty cit profanes the grove by his presence—

and she was anxious that her nephew might hold high and reverential notions regarding it, as the temple where God and the mind are to be studied and adored, and where the fiery soul can begin a premature communication with the other world. When I took my book, therefore, to the woods, I found nature not half poetical, not half visionary, enough. There was nothing which the most froward imagination would construe for a moment into a satyr or dryad. No Greek or Roman or even English fantasy could deceive me one instant into the belief of more than met the eye. In short, I found that I only transplanted into the new place my entire personal identity, and was grievously disappointed. Since I was cured of my air-castles I have fared somewhat better; and a pair of moonlight evenings have screwed up my esteem several pegs higher, by supplying my brains with several bright fragments of thought, and making me dream that mind as well as body respired more freely here. And there is an excellence in nature which familiarity never blunts the sense of—a serene superiority to man and his art, in the thought of which man dwindles to pigmy proportions. . . . In writing, as in all things else, I follow my caprice, and my pen has played me many tricks lately in taking a holiday somewhat longer than his wont, and sore against my will; for if my scribbling humour fails to come upon me, I am as uneasy as a cow unmilked—pardon the rusticity of the image—and in the end must yield my brain's yeasty burden, or die."

The passage serves as well as another to mark a

step between the boy's physical and the youth's esthetic love of nature, on the one hand, and the man's philosophic view of her, on the other; in fact, the personal history of a poet classically traced by Wordsworth in *Tintern Abbey*. And here as ever in the background is his sibylline aunt, tirelessly watching.

On the surface his life was flowing cheerfully enough, but it would be a mistake to suppose that he was experiencing none of the qualms and throes of readjustment. During April and May, 1824, in his twentieth year, he took a kind of personal inventory, in an attempt to prove to himself that he was better fitted by temperament for divinity than for any other profession. His meditations cover some ten pages in the Journal, but, in brief, they run as follows: "I have, or had, a strong imagination, and consequently a keen relish for the beauties of poetry and . . . an immoderate fondness for writing. . . . My reasoning faculty is proportionably weak, nor can I ever hope to write a Butler's Analogy or an Essay of Hume. Nor is it strange that with this confession I should choose theology . . . for, the highest species of reasoning upon divine subjects is rather the fruit of a sort of moral imagination, than of the 'Reasoning Machines,' such as Locke, and Clarke, and David Hume. . . . The preaching most in vogue at the present day depends chiefly on imagination for its success, and asks those accomplishments which I believe are most within my grasp. . . . There exists a signal defect in my character which neutralizes in great part the just influence my talents ought to have. Whether that defect

be in the *address,* in the fault of good forms . . . or deeper seated in the absence of common *sympathies,* or even in a levity of the understanding, I cannot tell. But its bitter fruits are a sore uneasiness in the company of most men and women, a frigid fear of offending and jealousy of disrespect, an inability to lead and an unwillingness to follow the current conversation, which contrive to make me second with all those among whom chiefly I wish to be first. . . . I am unfortunate also, as was Rienzi, in a propensity to laugh, or rather, snicker. I am ill at ease, therefore, among men. I criticize with hardness; I lavishly applaud; I weakly argue; and I wonder with a 'foolish face of praise.' "

This is the self-criticism of a somewhat belated adolescent, who has had few opportunities to cultivate poise, courage, and engaging effrontery in the competition of a mixed society. He concludes that he is ill-adapted to succeed in either law or medicine, in which a "professional manner" is of so much importance. "But in Divinity I hope to thrive. I inherit from my sire a formality of manner and speech, but I derive from him, or his patriotic parent, a passionate love for the strains of eloquence. I burn after the *'aliquid immensum infinitumque'* which Cicero desired. What we ardently love we learn to imitate." And yet the poor boy cannot feel in himself any burning enthusiasm for the vocation of his choice. "The coolest reason," he argues, "cannot censure my choice when I oblige myself professionally to a life which all wise men freely and advisedly adopt. I put no great restraint on my-

self, and can therefore claim but little merit in a manner of life which chimes with inclination and habit." One can read between the lines: the only reason why he should enter the ministry is that he can find no better reason for entering any other profession. "I would," he says, "sacrifice inclination to the interest of mind and soul. I would remember that

Spare Fast oft with Gods doth diet,

that Justinian devoted but one out of twenty-four hours to sleep, and this week (for instance) I will remember to curtail my dinner and supper sensibly and rise from the table each day with an appetite, till Tuesday evening next." Inclination failing, he will experiment with asceticism.

But he has not even yet finished his self-castigation. "Every wise man aims at an entire conquest of himself. . . . I am not assuredly that excellent creature. A score of words and deeds issue from me daily, of which I am not the master. They are begot of weakness and born of shame. I cannot assume the elevation I ought, but lose the influence I should exert among those of meaner or younger understanding, for want of sufficient *bottom* in my nature, for want of that confidence of manner which springs from an erect mind which is without fear and without reproach. . . . Even those feelings which are counted noble and generous take in me the taint of frailty. . . . What is called a warm heart, I have none. I am a lover of indolence, and of the belly. . . . How shall I strenuously enforce on men the duties and habits to which

I am a stranger? Physician, heal thyself. . . . I judge that if I devote my nights and days *in form,* to the service of God and the War against Sin, I shall soon be prepared to do the same *in substance.*"

In February, 1825, or nearly four years after his graduation, Ralph, or Waldo, as he was from this time called, moved to Cambridge to enter the Divinity School. On the night before he took up his residence there he wrote: "It is the evening of February eighth. . . . I go to my College Chamber to-morrow a little changed for better or worse since I left in 1821. I have learned a few more names and dates, additional facility of expression, the gauge of my own ignorance, its sounding-places and bottomless depths. I have inverted my inquiries two or three times on myself, and have learned what a sinner and a saint I am. My cardinal vice of intellectual dissipation—sinful strolling from book to book, from care to idleness—is my cardinal vice still; is a malady that belongs to the chapter of Incurables. I have written two or three hundred pages that will be of use to me. I have earned two or three thousand dollars which have paid my debts. . . . In short, I have grown older and have seen something of the vanity and something of the value of existence, have seen what shallow things men are, and how independent of external circumstances may be the states of mind called good and ill."

Two subjects were occupying his thoughts at the moment: the relations of theology and religion, and the relative advantages of society and solitude. Concerning theological problems he was never able to show

more than a dutiful interest, evidently believing, if we may so interpret his letters to Aunt Mary, that many of the questions about which theologians have fought most warmly are unsolvable and therefore best ignored. He saw no answer to the arguments of Hume, for example, but remained undisturbed. His aunt loved such wingy mysteries as the coming of the Holy Ghost, the doctrine of Original Sin, the theory of predestination, and pressed them upon his attention; but he replied: "I am blind, I fear, to the truth of a theology which I can't but respect for the eloquence it begets, and for the heroic life of its modern, and the heroic death of its ancient defenders. I acknowledge it tempts the imagination with a high epic (and better than epic) magnificence; but it sounds like mysticism in the ear of understanding. . . . Paley's deity and Calvin's deity are plainly two beings, both divine existences, but one a friend and the other a foe to that capacity of order and right, to that understanding which is made in us arbiter of things, the prophet of things unseen. . . . I cannot help revolting from the double deity, gross offspring of some Genevan school. I suppose you'll think me so dazzled by a flambeau that I can't see the sun when I say that the liberality of the age, though it stray into licentiousness and deism . . ." The rest of the letter is missing, but it is easy to carry on the thought, that the liberality of the age is better than a dogmatism that affronts man's instincts. What Aunt Mary replied we do not know, but no doubt it was characteristically fiery. For Aunt Mary has been described as one who wanted

everybody to be a Calvinist but herself. The correspondence proves that Emerson had at this time reëxamined the grounds of Trinitarianism and had found himself confirmed in the Unitarianism of his father.

As to his conclusions concerning the respective advantages of society and solitude, he sums them up in a noble paragraph which may stand as expressing his view on the subject throughout his life. "There *is* a good, solid and eternal, in casting off the dishonest fetters of opinion and nursing your solitary thoughts into a self-existence so that your thoughts and actions shall be in a degree your own. I commend no absurd sacrifices. I praise no wolfish misanthropy that retreats to thickets from cheerful towns, and scrapes the ground for roots and acorns, either out of a grovelling soul, or a hunger for glory that has mistaken grimace for philosophy. It is not the solitude of place, but the solitude of the soul which is so inestimable to us."

His mind, it will be seen, was sufficiently active, but, from his removal to Cambridge, his health grew worse and worse. Before summer his eyes had failed entirely and a "stricture of the chest" caused him and his family many forebodings. He was compelled to go to the farm of an uncle in Newton for rest and change. He was still able to tutor a few boys and, later, teach school in Chelmsford, in Roxbury, and, finally, in Cambridge, in his mother's house on North Avenue. And his health temporarily improved so much that, after a year of desultory study, he was able to satisfy the Middlesex Association of Ministers that he was pre-

pared to enter the ministry. He was therefore duly "approbated to preach" on October 10, 1826.

He had, however, hardly begun his ministry in the First Church, Boston, which had been his father's, when his health rapidly declined. He was clearly threatened with consumption, when his half-uncle, the Rev. Samuel Ripley, came forward with a generous offer to send him South for the winter; and, after a short delay to see his brother, Edward, who had just returned from Europe, he set sail for Charleston, South Carolina, on the twenty-fifth of November.

The records of his Southern journey are of no great interest as sketches of travel, but they testify to his liking for the expansive and genial manners of the South. In St. Augustine he met a picturesque character in Napoleon Achille Murat, eldest son of Joachim Murat, Napoleon's cavalry leader and King of Naples. Achille Murat had married a Virginian wife and was a planter near Tallahassee, when Emerson met him by chance and quickly reciprocated his friendly advances. Murat is described as "brave, frank, friendly, of a very active mind, but sceptical as to religious dogmas." Concerning him Emerson wrote at the time: "A new event is added to the quiet history of my life. I have connected myself by friendship to a man who with as ardent a love of truth as that which animates me, with a mind surpassing mine in the variety of its research, and sharpened and strengthened to an energy for *action* to which I have no pretension, by advantages of birth and practical connection with mankind beyond almost all men in the world—is, yet, that which

I had ever supposed only a creature of the imagination —a consistent Atheist—and a disbeliever in the existence, and, of course, in the immortality of the soul. My faith in these points is strong and I trust, as I live, indestructible. Meantime I love and honour this intrepid doubter. His soul is noble, and his virtue, as the virtue of a Sadducee must always be, sublime."

Such proximity to an "Atheist" caused him a few passing scepticisms and yet, in the end, he remained firm in his faith. Speaking, soon after, of the two worlds of society and of thought: "My friend," he says, "is at home in both these jarring empires, and whilst he taxes my powers in his philosophic speculations, can excel the coxcombs, and that, *con amore,* in the fluency of nonsense. Nevertheless I cannot but remember that God is in the heavens, God is here, and the eye of my friend is dull and blind and cannot perceive Him." "But," he characteristically adds, "what matter if this Being be acknowledged or denied, if the faith cannot impose any more effective restraint on vice and passion, than morals unsupported by this foundation?"

In addition to a friend his first extended journey away from home provided him with some valuable impressions of life in what was still a frontier settlement, and some observations of human nature in its vagrant and illogical manifestations. And yet whatever fruits it had are almost imperceptible. He was not ready to make the most of it.

He returned north by way of Charleston, Washington, Philadelphia, and New York, and reached Con-

cord, where his mother was visiting the Ripleys in the Old Manse, in June. On the way he had found time to record one or two thoughts which were to develop later into poems or essays. In a letter to his aunt, he notes that "every man of reflexion has felt a contiguity between what was minute and what was magnificent, which was never stated in words. There is not a thing so poor and refuse in the world but it has some aspect and connections which are grand. The chaff on the wind, the atom swimming in the sewer, fill a place in the system of matter as essential as the sun in heaven. And how, then, can man be low? If, on one side, his feet are in the dust, on the other there is nothing between his head and the infinite heavens." And in the Journal: "A poet represented as listening in pious silence, 'To the mighty stream of tendency.' There is much wisdom—let me say there is much duty in his employment." And again: "In the view of Compensations nothing is given. There is always a price."

Such notes, which might be greatly multiplied, give us insight into his ways of thinking. Some months before, on his voyage southward, he had written: "If an ingenious man lived long enough, he might learn to talk by system, in a manner out of all comparison better than men now use. Suppose him to keep a book of commonplaces, and, as his knowledge grew, put down on the page of each the theories that occurred. It is clear that in the process of time it would embrace all the ordinary subjects of human discourse." Commenting on the passage his son observes: "Mr. Emerson's own practice, from youth to age, of keeping

journals in which he, on the moment, recorded his thought or observation or sentence, and made his corollary, then or later, thereon, was the basis of all his writings—the poems, the lectures, the books—and gives a strange interest even to his occasional speech on public events."

His "system" appears more and more clearly as one studies the journals, and watches a seed thought grow or, what is quite as instructive, die without germinating. We first saw the seed of the doctrine of compensation, for example, in his reminiscences of his teaching in his nineteenth year, almost twenty years before the essay, "Compensation," appeared in *Essays: First Series,* of 1841. During this rather long period, he carried the fruitful idea with him wherever he went, finding new data and analogies at every turn. And the idea of self-reliance grew in a similar fashion, as did, no doubt, the ideas of polarity, of circles, of the over-soul, and a dozen other poetico-philosophical generalizations. The system recommended by Captain Cuttle of "when found, make a note of," became in his hands a special technique. The jottings in the Journals were what Coleridge called "aids to reflection"—fertile sentences which, even though they may have had no particular significance, at first, for the mind that conceived them, grew if later they found the intellectual soil congenial.

Without for the present examining these generalizations, we can still agree that few possessions can add more to the excitement of living than a small bundle of original notions, even though to others they may

seem fictions, which act upon the welter of experience as a reagent acts upon a salt in solution, precipitating a mist of sense impressions and perceptions into a pattern, as the acid precipitates the salt in crystals.

Nothing is more characteristic of Emerson than his ability to detect similarities and discover analogies. To be able to do so spontaneously is commonly looked upon as a mark of a poet, and some have thought it to be a concomitant of genius. In him this faculty evinced itself not only in the coinage of metaphors but in the perception of an essence or a pattern common to all sorts of things, from the humblest to the highest. Nothing pleased him more than to discover a running design in objects as different as possible. He liked to ponder such questions as

> "Why Nature loves the number five,
> And why the star-form she repeats;"

and, if he had lived in the Seventeenth Century, he might have made a hobby of the star-form as Sir Thomas Browne did of the quincunx. But with him the tracing of such resemblances was not merely a learned game, but was intrinsic to his view of nature.

> "As sings the pine-tree in the wind,
> So sings in the wind a sprig of the pine;
> Her strength and soul has laughing France
> Shed in each drop of wine,"

is the first step toward the generalization that

> "There is no great and no small
> To the Soul that maketh all:

And where it cometh, all things are;
And it cometh everywhere;"

or

"Spirit that lurks each form within
Beckons to spirit of its kin;
Self-kindled every atom glows
And hints the future which it owes;"

or

"Far and forgot to me is near;
Shadow and sunlight are the same;
The vanished gods to me appear;
And one to me are shame and fame."

Over and over he expresses his doctrine of each-in-all-and-all-in-each, ringing the changes upon the generalization—that lies at the bottom of most mysticism—found in a quotable form in the familiar quatrain of Blake:

To see the world in a grain of sand,
And a heaven in a wild-flower;
Hold infinity in the palm of your hand,
And eternity in an hour.

Probably every philosopher-poet early makes the discovery that to the speculative eye nothing is really any more remarkable than anything else, because, in the last analysis, everything is inexplicable, miraculous. To the practical mind, judging things by their use, phenomena may fall into the hierarchies of importance and unimportance, but to the poet, for whom nothing is important except the spirit "that bloweth where it

listeth," the appraisals of tradition, use, wont, custom, have only a practical and therefore a trivial validity. In a world in which

> "An endless chain of countless rings
> The next unto the farthest brings,"

who shall say which link in the chain is more important than another?

Some of Emerson's critics seem to have found his favourite doctrine a pretty idea, but still to be proved; and yet it really seems almost scientific in its common sense. Certainly, no thinking scientist would find any difficulty in apprehending what Blake meant in the four lines just quoted. The progress of science serves only to make its suggestion the more plausible, for, the more completely the distinction between matter and spirit disintegrates, the less difference does it make whether we look upon the All as spirit or matter. Science has been built upon laws of the conservation and dissipation of energy. If the mystic chooses to call energy spirit, who shall say that he has not a right to do so?

"Matter" is merely a substance we have ourselves invented to account for our sensations. We see, we touch, we hear, we smell, and by brilliant synthetic effort of imagination we put together all these sensations and picture to ourselves "matter" as being the source of them. Science itself is now purging "matter" of its complicated metaphysical properties. That "matter," the nature of which Dr. Johnson, as Boswell tells us, thought he had settled by "striking his foot with mighty force against a large stone," is coming to be regarded as merely electrical emanation. We now accept even that transmutation of the elements of which the alchemists dreamed. It is true that we still think of "matter"

as having weight. But so cautious a physicist as Sir Joseph Thomson long ago pointed out that weight is only an "apparently" invariable property of matter. So that "matter" becomes almost as "ethereal" as "spirit," and, indeed, scarcely distinguishable from "spirit." The spontaneous affirmation of the mystic that he lives in the spiritual world here and now will then be, in other words, merely the same affirmation which the man of science has more laboriously reached. The man, therefore, who is terrified by "materialism" has reached the final outpost of absurdity. He is a simple-minded person who places his own hand before his eyes and cries out in horror: "The Universe has disappeared!"[1]

In a quite literal sense the scientist now looks upon the grain of sand as a "world," or rather a universe of electrons, whatever these may be; the idealist sees in the wild flower a fragmentary specimen of that Beauty which resides in its fullness only in the heaven of the perfect; it does not require theories of higher-dimensional space to suggest that the present moment implies an infinite past and future, or a handful of earth, air, water, an infinite space. Indeed, such a conception is a commonplace of abstract thinking. The moment one has adopted as a truth the idea that "where the spirit cometh all things are, and it cometh everywhere," one has set out on a speculative journey that is certain to parallel Emerson's in the long run. That very few persons ever start on this journey is indicated by the puzzlement and ridicule that greeted such a poem as "Brahma." "When me they fly, I am the wings," and "I am the doubter and the doubt," sound in the practical ear like enigma or mere nonsense, instead of a valiant attempt to express what is of

[1]Havelock Ellis, *The Dance of Life,* 1923, pp. 229–230.

course inexpressible: though it is no more so than are the ultimate notions of science.

The time may come when we shall have a metaphysical mathematics, by means of which we shall be able to formulate spiritual laws comparable in exactness to the laws of thermodynamics. The idea that we might was a favourite one with Emerson, as we shall see. The difficulty which confronts a practical idealist, such as he was, is that, even though spirit and matter may be identical or, as he believed, matter may have no separate existence, the fact remains that matter, energy, electricity, or whatever it is that science has to do with, admits of exact measurement and experiment; and mind, intelligence, soul, life, spirit, or whatever it is that faith has to do with, does not. As Lord Kelvin says:

"When you can measure what you are speaking of and express it in numbers, you know something about it, and when you cannot measure it, when you cannot express it in numbers, your knowledge is of a meagre and unsatisfactory kind. It may be the beginning of knowledge, but you have scarcely in your thought advanced to the stage of science."[1]

One feels that it was some apprehension of this fact that led Emerson to seek incessantly for spiritual laws, or at least for those resemblances and analogies in man and nature that might suggest spiritual laws—laws which might in time be established by observation, experience, and experiment. And it was the same impulse that made him as a rule speak of science with respect and try, though perhaps amateurishly enough,

[1]Quoted in *The Electron,* by Robert Andrews Millikan, 1924.

to acquaint himself with the current generalizations of science. With the scientific technique, the "thousand painful steps" by means of which science conquers each new foot of the hitherto Unknown, his mind was not attuned. His technique was rather that of the poet, who confronts the world of phenomena and ideas with a "wise passiveness," not at all believing that

> Nothing of itself will come,
> But we must still be seeking.

Every idea that came into consciousness, whether it rose out of the subliminal or floated out of the infinite, was a possible "lustre," to be welcomed and recorded. Its value might be that of a revelation: one could hardly tell until one had lived with it for a while and tried it out. It might be fertile: it might be sterile: but until one knew, it should be kept under observation, like a beetle under a bell jar. Science, as Professor Millikan has said,

> like a plant, grows, in the main, by accretion. Each research is usually a modification of the preceding one; each new theory is built like a cathedral through the addition of many builders of many different elements.

The phrase, "in the main," suggests that there are exceptions, of course, but does not invalidate the truth that the scientific view of the world grows mainly by the slow accretions of what Carlyle calls the "arithmetical Undertsanding"; the poetic, by a kind of "mutations" or jumps made by feeling or intuitive vision.

At the time of his life with which we are dealing,

Emerson was groping away from the practical and religious habit of mind of his ancestors toward the instinctive pantheism through which poets, or at least nature poets, seem always to pass. There is little in him, however, of the typical mystic, except in so far as the speculative utterances of mysticism are always more or less pantheistic. He is like the mystics in his impatience with historical revelation, oracles, answers to prayer, and the like; and in his starting from the divine nature rather than from man and his surroundings; but he is unlike them in lack of ecstasy, of clairvoyance, of supine submission to an ineffable union with the divine.

Pantheism would certainly appeal,[1] at least for a time, to one who already perceived the philosophic difficulties of the "dualism of the One and the Many, unity and difference, thought and extension." But it is doubtful if he ever thought of himself as a pantheist, or, indeed, if he ever sought to classify himself philosophically at all. Besides, pantheism seems to be a transitional rather than a permanent belief of poets, as Wordsworth and Shelley perhaps bear witness. As yet Emerson had not felt the full force of what Wordsworth called in his prosy way "the influence of natural objects." His inspirations were still mostly from books; but he was beginning to read Wordsworth, even though as yet he did not like him.

His reading in general served, not to suggest lines of thoughts, but to confirm or at most to modify lines

[1] "Most men are pantheists, say what they will of their theism."—*Journal*, 1864.

already discovered. Perhaps "lines" is a poor word to describe his progress, which impresses one as a series of impulsions one way or another, rather than as a sequence of ideas. For comparisons with his way of thinking we must go to the poets, like Wordsworth, or Shelley, or even Whitman, rather than to the philosophers, on the one hand, or to the mystics, on the other.

A certain hard-headedness—something which Lowell called the Yankee—in him, that in a man of different temper would have been scepticism, kept him from the surrender to simple ecstasy of the typical Christian mystic, and also from the surrender to nihilism of the Oriental. There was more of Plato in him than of the Platonists. As he grew older, he fell under the spell of the Sufism of Saadi and Hafez, for a time—a softening of the intense and practical mysticism of the Near East, which won him by its airy and poetical pantheism, "in which a mystic apprehension of the unity and divinity of all things heightens the delight in natural and human beauty."[1] Such a literary mysticism was inevitably attractive to him. Indeed, so void was his belief of all extravagance and enthusiasm, so lacking in asceticism on the one hand and in spiritual intoxication on the other, that one hesitates to call him a mystic at all; the more so that now and then in his Journals he uses the words "mystical" and "mysticism" as synonyms for religious incontinence.

In tracing his mental journey, the notebooks and the poems are more illuminating than are the prose

[1] "Mysticism," by Pringle-Pattison, in the *Encyclopædia Britannica.*

works, because, in the latter, afterthought, filling, ratiocination of primal "lustres," sometimes cloud the native hue of his speculation. In the notebooks and the poems one sees a philosophy forming; in the prose works one finds rather a philosophy applied. But nowhere does one discover anything suggesting a "conversion." There is no burst of a great white light such as shone round Paul on the road to Damascus or round Teufelsdröckh in the Rue St. Thomas de l'Enfer.

This smoothness of his spiritual road has made some ardent souls doubtful about him. They like to imagine that a great nature must grow by cataclysm and, searching his life, have been unable to find one. But such a view is too ingenuous.

I know of no discussion of the spiritual life and of the special phenomena of conversion that so completely describes the religious experience of Emerson as the chapter on "The Art of Religion" in Havelock Ellis's *The Dance of Life;* and Mr. Ellis's account of his own conversion might, if due allowance is made for his biological predilections, almost be an account of Emerson's.

After explaining the effect upon his mind of a reading of James Hinton's *Life in Nature,* and of his subsequent thinking, he concludes:

> Thus, it might seem to many, nothing whatever had happened. I had not gained one single definite belief that could be expressed in a scientific formula or hardened into a religious creed. That, indeed, is the essence of such a process. A "conversion" is not, as is often assumed, a turning towards a belief. More strictly, it is a turning round, a revolution; it has no primary reference to any external object. As the greater mystics have often understood,

"the Kingdom of God is within." To put the matter a little more precisely, the change is fundamentally a readjustment of psychic elements to each other, enabling the whole machine to work harmoniously. There is no necessary introduction of new ideas; there is much more likely to be a casting out of dead ideas which have clogged the vital process. The psychic organism—which in conventional religion is called the "soul"—had not been in harmony with itself; now it is revolving truly on its own axis, and in doing so it simultaneously finds its true orbit in the cosmic system. In becoming one with itself, it becomes one with the universe.

People who come in contact with the phenomenon of "conversion" are obsessed by the notion that it must have something to do with morality. They seem to fancy that it is something that happens to a person leading a bad life whereby he suddenly leads a good life. That is a delusion. . . . Not only is there no necessary moral change in such a process, still less is there any necessary intellectual change. Religion need not involve intellectual suicide. On the intellectual side there may be no obvious change whatever. No new creed or dogma had been adopted. It might rather be said that, on the contrary, some prepossessions, hitherto unconscious, had been realized and cast out. The operations of reason, so far from being fettered, can still be effected with greater freedom and on a larger scale. . . . It appears to me, therefore, on the basis of personal experience, that the process thus outlined is a natural process.

The entire chapter is illuminating, but I have not space to quote more.

In Emerson we have a man of rather low emotional pressure and a certain canniness of mind, whose life seemed to flow, like his beloved Musketaquid, without perceptible freshets and without drought. His conversion was a gradual process, suggesting the metaphor of an army quietly occupying new territory, rather than that of an army taking a stronghold by assault. And yet it would be a mistake to suppose that he experienced none of the qualms and throes of readjustment.

His spiritual discomfort was the fruit mainly of loyalty to traditions which he honestly admired but could no longer accept. And this loyalty was so strong that it led him into what he later recognized as a misstep—his entrance into the ministry. In brief, his motives, as one finds them implied in the Journals, were these: He felt no genuine call to preach—certainly no sanctification for what he believed a high calling; but he hoped that, once in the profession, he might, as he says, by practising the form, at length achieve the substance. And this is not an entirely fantastic idea. One is reminded of Mary Garth's remark to her father, Caleb, in *Middlemarch,* when the latter is worried over his unfitness for a position which he can easily obtain: "But you know, Father, in these matters the deserving comes afterwards." Emerson hoped that the deserving would come in time, and he permitted himself to drift into a profession in which many a man has succeeded with no warmer enthusiasm than his. The trouble was that he was not ready to settle the question irrevocably one way or the other. The pressure of tradition, family expectations, and social sanctions all pushed him toward the ministry.

CHAPTER FOUR

CRISIS

IN DECEMBER, 1827, Emerson went to Concord, New Hampshire, to preach, and met Ellen Louisa Tucker. He seems promptly to have fallen in love.

Ellen, who was the daughter of the late Beza Tucker, a Boston merchant, is described as lovely in both person and character. Her portrait shows her to have possessed a forehead noticeably broad and high, framed in heavy dark hair, parted in the middle, curly, and caught up at the sides so as to disclose the lobe of the ear. Large eyes, wide open and a little sad in expression, a straight but sizable nose, full lips, and tapering chin, combine in a look of mingled innocence and intelligence. Perhaps it is because one knows her subsequent history that one seems to read in the face a physical fragility that forebodes a short life. A year was to elapse before Emerson was to declare his passion. In the meantime he accepted the pastorate of the Second (Unitarian) Church of Boston, at first as the colleague of the Reverend Henry Ware and later as sole incumbent.

His pleasure in this success was darkened by the failure in health of his brother, Edward, who in attempting to combine the study of law in Daniel Webster's office with a multitude of other activities

broke down completely. Two spells of temporary insanity left his powers permanently impaired and preluded his death in Porto Rico, six years later. There can be no doubt that Waldo's habits, so often deplored in the Journals, of dilatoriness and "levity of spirit," were in reality a blessing and may have been an unconscious protection against the "preternatural energy" which killed his brother.

Emerson's pastorate of the Second Church was, superficially at least, entirely successful. His preaching was well liked, and he was both liked and respected. His style of preaching was plain, his manner quiet, his tone unpretentiously elevated. His appeal was to the intelligence. As for the literary style of his sermons, in its solidity, evenness of flow, and lack of salient concreteness, it seems unexciting compared with that of his later years.

In December, 1828, a second visit to Concord took him again into Ellen's "dangerous neighbourhood" and the "presumptuous man was overthrown by the eye and ear, and surrendered at discretion."

Almost immediately, however, his romance was threatened by a terrible possibility. Ellen, never robust, showed symptoms of tuberculosis. A tour into the White Mountains was ordered, and, accordingly, late in August she and her lover in a chaise, accompanied by her mother and sister in a carriage, set out for Lake Winnipesaukee and thence wandered northward, past Chocorua, most picturesque of mountains, to Crawford Notch, the scene of Hawthorne's impressive story, "The Ambitious Guest," and finally returned

homeward by way of Hanover and the Connecticut Valley through Springfield and Worcester to Boston. It was a pilgrimage to dream over.

By such means her health was sufficiently improved for her to think of marriage; and on September 30, 1829, the wedding was celebrated at the house, in Concord, of her stepfather, Colonel Kent. The bridegroom was then twenty-six years old; the bride eighteen. They immediately began housekeeping in Chardon Place, Boston, Madame Emerson living with them.

Never again was Emerson to write verse of such singing sweetness as in the lyrics inspired by Ellen during the first year of their married life: "Lines to Ellen," "To Ellen at the South," "To Ellen," and "Thine Eyes Still Shined." "To Ellen," recalling a theme exquisitely expressed by Ronsard and Yeats, does not pale by comparison:

"And Ellen, when the graybeard years
Have brought us to life's evening hour,
And all the crowded Past appears
A tiny scene of sun and shower,

"Then, if I read the page aright
Where Hope, the soothsayer, reads our lot,
Thyself shalt own the page was bright,
Well that we loved, woe had we not,

"When Mirth is dumb and Flattery's fled,
And mute thy music's dearest tone,
When all but Love itself is dead
And all but deathless Reason gone."

Some may prefer the joyous rhythms of "To Ellen at the South," which he caught only once again, in the "Humble-Bee"; or the simple sincerity of the following:

"Thine eyes still shined for me, though far
I lonely roved the land or sea
As I behold yon evening star,
Which yet beholds not me.

"This morn I climbed the misty hill
And roamed the pastures through;
How danced thy form before my path
Amidst the deep-eyed dew!

"When the redbird spread his sable wing,
And showed his side of flame;
When the rosebud ripened to the rose,
In both I read thy name."

Only two years later, in February, 1832, Ellen died.

Meanwhile he had been faithfully performing his duties as pastor, while in his private thinking he was struggling with the problem of free will. "The government of God," he writes, in October, "is not on a plan —that would be Destiny; it is extempore. The history of the universe is a game of which the object to be gained is the greatest good of the whole, and is attained by a long series of independent *moves*. The omniscient Eye makes each new move from a survey of all the present state of the game. Hence the efficacy of *Prayer*. God determines from all the facts, and my earnest desires make one of the facts." It is interest-

ing to compare this view of Providence with that expressed, thirty years later, in the essay "Fate." In the next month he declares: "Every man by God's arrangements whilst he ministers and receives influence from all others is absolutely, imperially free. When I look at the rainbow I find myself the centre of its arch. But so are you; and so is the man that sees it, a mile from both of us. So also the globe is round, and every man therefore stands on the top, King George and the chimney-sweep no less."

At the same time he was beginning to feel his fetters, light as they undoubtedly were. In a letter to his aunt in December, after telling her what pleasure he had in reading Coleridge's *The Friend,* he continues: "What a fight all our lives long between prudence and sentiment; though you contradicted once when I tried to make a sentence, that life was embarrassed by prudentials. The case in point is this:—My soul is chained down even in its thoughts, where it should be freest, lordliest. The Christmas comes, a hallowed anniversary to me as to others, yet am I not ready to explore and explain the way of the star-led wizards —am looking at the same Truth which they sought, on quite another side and in novel relations. I could think and speak to some purpose, I say, if you would take what I have got, but if I must do what seems so proper and reasonable—conform to the occasion— I can only say what is trite, and will, 'tis likely, be ineffectual. This is a very disadvantageous example of that warfare that is in all professional life between the heroical and the proper." In February of the next year

he declares that "every man makes his own religion, his own God, his own charity; takes none of these from the Bible or his neighbour entire."

We find, moreover, that he was becoming interested in natural evolution, the first thought of which seems to have occurred to him a year or two before. The Swedenborgians had opened a church in Boston, and Sampson Reed, one of the local lights of that faith, was his friend. From two sides, therefore, the scientific and the mystical, his curiosity was being fed with ideas which he turned to his own purpose. His reading continued to be, as before, largely in the Greek and Latin classics and the greater authors of the Sixteenth and Seventeenth centuries in England, but one notices a few significant additions: Coleridge's *The Friend* and *Aids to Reflection;* Wordsworth at large; and various books of popular science, especially botany and entomology. He was also venturing to read some current fiction—Disraeli and Bulwer, for example.

The idea that more than any other, perhaps, appears among his notes is the idea of self-reliance. "Is there any hiding of the character of an apple-tree or a geranium, or of an ore, or of a horse, or of a man?" he asks. Everywhere he see illustrations of a principle which, as we have seen, occupied his thoughts in college. "They say the vines failed because in America they wanted to grow Madeira wine, instead of bringing out the native wines, probably equally good, of this region; so men fail as far as they leave their native moral instincts in the admiration of other

character. Let them on the contrary have greater confidence in the plan, yet to them unknown, which the moral Architect has traced for them. . . . The elm is a bad oak, but a beautiful elm." "I would have a man trust himself, believe that he has all the endowments necessary to balance each other in a perfect character, if only he will allow them all fair play." "It seems to be true that the more exclusively idiosyncratic a man is, the more general and infinite he is, which, though it may not be a very intelligible expression, means, I hope, something intelligible." "It is when a man does not listen to himself, but to others, that he is depraved and misled. The great men of the world, the teachers of the race, moralists, Socrates, Newton, Butler, and the like, were those who did not take their opinions on trust, but explored themselves, and that is the way ethics and religion were got out." "A man is invincible, be his cause great or small, . . . whenever he expresses the simple truth. This makes the cogency of the talk of common people in common affairs." "It ought to be considered that the meanest human soul contains a model of action greater than is realized by the greatest man." "When a man has got to a certain point in his career of truth he becomes conscious forevermore that he must take himself for better, for worse, as his portion; that what he can get out of his plot of ground by the sweat of his brow is his meat, and though the wide universe is full of good, not a particle can he add to himself but through his toil bestowed on this spot. It looks to him indeed a little spot, a poor barren possession,

filled with thorns, and a lurking place for adders, apes and wolves. But cultivation will work wonders. It will enlarge to his eye as it is explored. That little nook will swell to a world of light and power and love." "Smother no dictate of your soul, but indulge it. There are passages in the history of Jesus which to some minds seem defects in his character. Probably a more full apprehension of his history will show you these passages in a more agreeable light. Meantime count them defects, and do not stifle your moral faculty, and force it to call what it thinks evil, good. For there is no being in the universe whose integrity is so precious to you as that of your own soul."

These passages, all taken from the Journal of 1830, have an autobiographical significance which their calmness of manner might make us miss. During the same year he was reading with great care and taking voluminous notes on De Gerando's *Systèmes de Philosophie*. It was perhaps his first methodical examination of the beginings of metaphysical speculation among the Greeks before Aristotle. Quite as interesting are the entries in a commonplace-book of passages from his general reading, for all but three or four are variously expressed affirmations of the same idea, by Aristotle, Samuel Daniel, Donne, Herbert, St. Paul, Novalis, Goethe, and Landor. A stanza from Daniel, a noble but neglected poet, who was a favourite of Wordsworth, must have chimed gratefully with Emerson's mood at the time:

> Knowing the Heart of man is set to be
> The centre of this world, about the which

> These revolutions of disturbances
> Still roll; where all the aspects of misery
> Predominate; whose strong effects are such
> As he must bear, being helpless to redress:
> And that unless above himself he can
> Erect himself, how poor a thing is man!

"Man in a microcosm," as Aristotle expressed it, or as Donne:

> As man is of the world, the Heart of man
> Is an Epitome of God's great book
> Of creatures, and men need no further look.

It is one of the commonplaces of the poets; but with his mind upset by the growing irksomeness of a pretence of holding theological views which he had come to consider unnecessary to his spiritual life, and with the rapidly declining health of his young wife, he was glad of any support from the great minds with which he habitually consorted. The emergence of the doctrine of self-reliance which forms, so to speak, the very muscle of his philosophy can be traced clearly day by day; and yet the final adoption of it as a guide to action no doubt came in the end as in effect an inspiration.

"Ellen Tucker Emerson died, 8th February, Tuesday morning, 9 o'clock. . . ." The two lines comprise all of the immediate record, but five days later appears the page which has so often been quoted: "There is that which passes away and never returns. This miserable apathy, I know, may wear off. I almost fear when it will. I shall go again among my friends with a tranquil countenance. . . . But will the dead be restored to me? . . . Shall I ever again be able to

connect the face of outward nature, the mists of morn, the star of eve, the flowers, and all poetry, with the heart and life of an enchanting friend? No. There is one birth, and one baptism, and one first love, and the affections cannot keep their youth any more than men." Such a phrase as "an enchanting friend," occurring in such a context has a chilling effect, and one biographer calls it "exasperating." But there persisted in Emerson an Eighteenth Century formality of phrase, even in the intimacy of his Journals. Besides, it is possible that the phrase is entirely accurate, and that Ellen's influence upon her husband was, as his poems suggest, primarily that of a thing of beauty, like the evening star, the flowers, the birds, or one possessing the beauty of natural holiness. A little later he recalls her as his "dead saint," and, in April, with the approach of Lent, he writes: "The days go by, griefs, and simpers, and sloth and disappointments. The dead do not return, and sometimes we are negligent of their image. Not of yours, Ellen. I know too well who is gone from me." And in the same entry is more than a hint of his other trouble. "And here come on the formal duties which are to be formally discharged, and in our sluggish minds no sentiment rises to quicken them, they seem—— And when the Fast comes, what shall I say? It is forgot and despised. It is the remainder of an ancient race, and like old furniture to be dispensed with, it is huddled aside by the upstart generation. . . ." He determines not to huddle it aside, himself, but to "respect this Fast as a connecting link by which the posterity is bound to

the fathers; as a trump through which the voice of the fathers speaks."

When, in the same year, he finally parted from his church the reason he assigned was an unwillingness to administer the Communion according to the Unitarian rite then in use; and at the time and subsequently much was made of the particular bit of ritual which proved for him a step of stumbling. And yet anyone who reads the Journals attentively must perceive that if it had not been the Lord's Supper it must have been something else. All his thinking, since his college years, had borne him irresistibly in one direction, and that was away from every kind of traditional, authoritative, or imitative ritual, creed, or belief whatsoever. He was willing, of course, to use another man's ideas if these coincided in essence with his own, but the main value for him of such coincidences was that they confirmed him in the truth of his own intuitions. It was in this same year that he was writing such sentences as: "When a truth is presented, it always brings its own authority, doth it not?" and "Trust to that prompting within you. No man ever got above it. Men have transgressed and hated and blasphemed it, but no man ever sinned but he felt it towering above him and threatening him with ruin." And in June, 1831: "I suppose it is not wise, not being natural, to belong to any religious party. In the Bible you are not directed to be a Unitarian, or a Calvinist, or an Episcopalian. Now if a man is wise, he will not only not profess himself to be a Unitarian, but he will say to himself, I am not a member of that or of any party.

I am God's child. . . . Now let a man get into a stage-coach with this distinct understanding of himself, divorcing himself in his heart from every party, and let him meet religious men of every different sect, and he will find scarce any proposition uttered by them to which he does not assent, and none to the sentiment of which he does not assent, though he may insist on varying the language. As fast as any man becomes great, that is, thinks, he becomes a new party. Socrates, Aristotle, Calvin, Luther, Abélard, what are these but names of parties? Which is to say, As fast as we use our own eyes, we quit these parties or Unthinking Corporations, and join ourselves to God in an unpartaken relation. A sect or party is an elegant incognito devised to save a man from the vexation of thinking."

Surely a man who thought in this wise was destined to leave the "party," even though he had to invent a pretext for doing so.

His leaving, which came in the summer of 1832, was quiet enough, gratefully devoid of all captiousness or acrimony. Proposals and counter proposals were made and rejected, and Emerson's incumbency terminated with complete mutual respect. Some of his congregation were puzzled and some of his brother ministers feared that his mind had been affected by too much metaphysical hair-splitting. And he was well aware that, for temperaments different from his, his lack of accommodation in this instance would be misinterpreted. "I know very well," he says, "that it is a bad sign in a man to be too conscientious and stick at

gnats. The most desperate scoundrels have been the over-refiners. Without accommodation society is impracticable." Thus did he anticipate the criticisms of society. And yet he had made up his mind that, freedom being a necessity to his spirit, he must run the risk of appearing an "over-refiner."

In his farewell letter he summed the issue up in the words: "This is the end of my opposition, that I am not interested in it. I am content that it stand to the end of the world, if it please men and please Heaven, and I shall rejoice in all the good it produces." These sentences Mr. Firkin calls, "words of unequalled loftiness and benignity, but their *withdrawnness,* their sequestration, is unequivocal"; and Barrett Wendell says of them:

> "I am content that it should stand to the end of the world," but "I am not interested in it"—that is the view expressed of the holiest mystery of Christianity by a man who stood for three years in the pulpit of Cotton Mather. It is doubtful whether the whole literature of heresy contains two phrases which to any mind still affected by traditional Christian faith must seem more saturated with serene insolence. Serenely insolent, at least to orthodox Christians, Emerson remained all his life.

Lofty and benign, though withdrawn, or serenely insolent—the reader may take his choice. To me the words suggest a man who is tired. At any rate, his health, so long precarious, now quite broke down. On Christmas Day, 1832, he set sail for Malta, on the trading brig *Jasper.*

But before we follow his fortunes on this his first journey abroad, we may catch up a few threads of his

interior life. During the period of his wife's illness he diverted his mind by reading several of the Waverley Novels, among which *The Bride of Lammermoor* excited his special admiration. What appealed to him in Scott, above all, was the idealism of the characters. "Is it not true," he asks, "that by the law of sympathy the soul sees in every great character only a mirror in which its own pinched features are expanded to true dimensions, 'the shows of things to the desires of the mind'?" And, again: "The love of novels is the preference of sentiment to the world of the senses. Who are they that love an ideal world and dwell in it? The young, the pure, who believe that love is stronger than lust; who delight in the belief that virtue may prevail over the power of circumstances." And he develops a theory in defence of romantic idealism in fiction that reads a little strangely just now, his idea being that a great novel is always an apologue or parable, reminding us that "a greater heroism than has delighted us in Wallace, or Richard, or Ravenswood, is offered to us. In the common air, in the paved street, in all the details trite of vulgar life we may tread with the step of a king. We may not fight down rivals, but we may live like a wise man among silly people. Among gluttons and sycophants we may carry the hand of Franklin and the heart of Paul. And the good *call out* great sentiments, as well as give them. That which is like us in other minds will start from sleep in our presence." Such a view of the uses of fiction the sophisticated will greet with a smile. Mr.

E. M. Forster has recently announced that Scott has "a trivial mind and a heavy style. He cannot construct. He has neither artistic detachment nor passion, and how can a writer who is devoid of both, create characters who will move us deeply?" And elsewhere he pronounces Scott's once so-much-admired descriptions "pasteboard." Now Emerson was by no means blind to such literary virtues as artistic seriousness, a sinuous style, detachment, and passion; but he found in Scott, above all other novelists, a quality which in his eyes outweighed all others: nobility; while Mr. Forster finds only "a temperate heart and gentlemanly feelings, and an intelligent affection for the countryside." As for his integrity, according to the latter: "that is worse than nothing, for it is purely moral and commercial integrity. It satisfied his highest needs and he never dreamt that another sort of loyalty exists." These two opinions are representative of polar differences at the two ends of a century. To-day Scott's reputation seems to have reached its nadir. Perhaps the only way for us to make up our minds about it is to reread the Waverly Novels.

More significant is Emerson's increasing interest in Wordsworth. His first references to the Engiish poet are dated 1828. At that time he was irritated by his "direct pragmatical analysis of objects, in their nature *poetic,* but which all other poets touch incidentally. He mauls the moon and the waters and the bulrushes, as his main business. Milton and Shakespeare touch them gently, as illustration or ornament." "Mr. Wordsworth is trying to distil the essence of poetry from poetic

things, instead of being satisfied to adorn common scenes with such lights from these sources of poetry as nature will always furnish to her true lovers." As pointing out Wordsworth's solemn and professional air when confronting a daisy or celandine, this is good criticism; and yet before long Emerson himself would be writing poems on a titmouse and a bumblebee.

Three years later, he finds respite from worry by reading the *River Duddon* sonnets, the "Ode to Duty," "Dion," "Laodamia," and the "Happy Warrior." He speaks of the "severe, eternal strain of 'Dion,'" which he ranks above "Laodamia"; commends "A Poet's Epitaph," but pronounces the last line "miserable"; and calls "The Happy Warrior" excellent. He concludes his notes with the following estimate: "His noble distinction is that he seeks the truth and shuns with brave self-denial every image and word that is from the purpose, means to stick close to his own thought and give it in naked simplicity and so make it God's affair, not his own whether it shall succeed. But he fails of executing this purpose fifty times for the sorry purpose of making a rhyme in which he has no skill, or from imbecility of mind losing sight of his thought, or from self-surrender to custom in poetic diction." To this is appended a remark of his mother's which is too good to omit: "I apologized for his (*i.e.*, Wordsworth's) baby pieces to my mother by saying that he was Agesilaus, who rode on a cane with his children. She said that *Agesilaus did not ride out of doors.*"

In December, 1831, he writes to his aunt: "What

from the woods, the hills, the enveloping heaven? What from the interior creation—if what is within is not the creator? How many changes men ring on these two words *in* and *out*. It is all our philosophy. Take them away, and what were Wordsworth or Swedenborg? The rough and tumble old fellows, Bacons, Miltons, and Burkes, don't wire-draw. That's why I like Montaigne. No effeminate parlour workman is he, on an idea got at an evening lecture or a young men's debate, but roundly tells what he saw, or what he thought of when he was riding horseback or entertaining a troop at his château. A gross, semi-savage indecency debases his book, and ought doubtless to turn it out of doors, but the robustness of his sentiments, the generosity of his judgments, the downright truth without fear or favour, I do embrace with both arms. It is wild and savoury as sweet fern. Henry VIII. loved to see a *man,* and it is exhilarating, once in a while to come across a genuine Saxon stump, a wild, virtuous man who knows books, but gives them their right place in his mind, lower than his reason. Books are apt to turn reason out of doors. You find men talking everywhere from their memories, instead of from their understanding. I stole this from Montaigne, as is very likely, I don't care. I should have said it myself."

A growing admiration of plain language as the vehicle of plain thinking is evident, and at the close of the year he expresses himself as "cheered and instructed by this paper on Corn Law Rhymes in the

Edinburgh by my Germanick new-light writer, whoever he may be"—his first reference to Carlyle. And he is copying into his notebook sentences from Landor. Wordsworth, Coleridge, Carlyle, and Landor were the four men whom he most longed to meet in Europe.

CHAPTER FIVE

EUROPE AND TRANSCENDENTALISM

EMERSON'S itinerary, was, in brief, as follows: From Malta he sailed to Sicily, visiting Syracuse, Catania, and Messina; crossed to Palermo, and thence to Naples, to Rome, and to Florence, staying overnight with Landor at Fiesole; to Venice, by way of Bologna, Ferrara, and Padua; to Verona, Brescia, and Milan; over the Simplon to Geneva, with a side trip to Voltaire's Ferney; to Paris, where he attended a banquet in honour of Lafayette; and to London, meeting there Mill, Coleridge, and other notable men. Leaving London on August 9th, he journeyed northward, visiting Oxford, Birmingham, Kenilworth, and Warwick, Tamworth, Derby, Sheffield, York, Newcastle, and Berwick. In Scotland, from Edinburgh he went to Glasgow, through the Trossachs, and paid his memorable visit of one night to the Carlyles at Craigenputtock, returning to Dumfries, Carlisle, and Liverpool, but pausing to call upon Wordsworth at Ambleside, on August 28th.

He has left an account of his meetings with Landor, Coleridge, Wordsworth, and Carlyle in *English Traits* (published 1856), and it would be vain to try to condense it here. As he was waiting for a fair wind in Liverpool, he wrote in his Journal his general im-

pressions of his travels as follows: "I thank the Great God who has led me through this European scene, this last schoolroom in which he has pleased to instruct me, . . . in safety and pleasure, and has now brought me to the shore and the ship that steers westward. He has shown me the men I wished to see—Landor, Coleridge, Carlyle, Wordsworth; he has thereby comforted and confirmed me in my convictions. Many things I owe to the sight of these men. I shall judge more justly, less timidly, of wise men forevermore. To be sure not one of these is a mind of the very first class, but what the intercourse with each of these suggests is true of intercourse with better men, that they never *fill the ear*—fill the mind—no, it is an idealized portrait which we always draw of them. Upon an intelligent man, wholly a stranger to their names, they would make in conversation no deep impression, none of a world-filling fame—they would be remembered as sensible, well-read, earnest men, not more. Especially they are all deficient, all these four—in different degrees, but all deficient—in insight into religious truth. They have no idea of that species of moral truth which I call the first philosophy. . . . The comfort of meeting men of genius such as these is that they talk sincerely, they feel themselves to be so rich that they are above the meanness of pretending to knowledge which they have not, and they frankly tell you what puzzles them. But Carlyle—Carlyle is so amiable that I love him."

What strikes one most in Emerson's notes on his travels is their almost preternatural calm. Here was a

man of thirty, unknown to the world outside of New England. In person he appeared merely an intelligent, studious, well-mannered man of natural dignity. Although he carried letters of introduction, he forbore to present them because he preferred to introduce himself. And yet on the voyage across the Atlantic he recalled wistfully his voyage years before with Murat and found no one of his fellow passengers as fascinating; after conversing with Wordsworth, he remembered a friend in Chelmsford who was as "wise a talker." In Naples, he quotes the old saying, "See Naples and then die," and adds: "And what if it is Naples, it is only the same world of cakes and ale, of men and truth and folly. I won't be imposed upon by a name. It is so easy, almost so inevitable, to be overawed by names, that on entering this bay it is hard to keep one's judgment upright, and be pleased only after your own way." In Rome, he writes: "I have seen St. John Lateran's and the Pantheon, and the Baptistery of Constantine, and the sad remnants of the palaces of the Cæsars, and many many ruins more. Glad was I amidst all these old stumps of the past ages to see Lewis Stackpole, fresh and beautiful as a young palm tree in the desert. Rome is very pleasant to me, as Naples was not, if only for one circumstance, that here I have pleasant companies to eat my bread with, and there I had none." And in a letter to his aunt from Italy: " 'Here is matter for all feeling,' said Byron, and yet how evanescent and superficial is most of that emotion which art and magnificence can awaken. It yields in me to the interest the most ordinary com-

panion inspires. I never get used to men." Nevertheless, the old diffidence breaks out now and then. In Venice, amid notes on the Doge's Palace, the Bridge of Sighs, and the Lions of St. Mark's, he forlornly confesses: "I have no skill to live with men, that is, with such men as the world is made of; and such as I delight in I seldom find. It seems to me, no boy makes so many blunders or says such awkward, contrary, disagreeable speeches as I do. In the attempt to oblige a person I wound and disgust him. I pity the hapless folks that have to do with me."

One might suspect that his spirit in the presence of "art and magnificence" was mostly the egregious Yankee independence which found complete expression in *Innocents Abroad,* were it not for the recurrent hints that his apparent radicalism was really the result of a deeper conservatism. It was no mere suspicion or defiance of the past and all its works, as objects of tradition and imitation. His radicalism was what all sound radicalism is, really a return to roots. He had at last thrown off the past and had returned to nature, or, which was for him at the time the same thing, religion. He had a touchstone by which he tested everybody and everything that came within his ken, and he applied it, often unconsciously, everywhere.

His test of people and things was whether they fed the spirit. Superficially he tried to be all things to all men, and though, as he confesses in the passage quoted above, he often failed, he still was able to adapt his approach to *great* men with remarkable shrewdness, considering his social inexperience. With Landor he

was alert and provocative; with Coleridge, demure; with Wordsworth, attentive but a little amused; with Carlyle, spontaneously warm, though reverential and even childlike. But the upshot of these and a hundred other contacts was the conviction that the "heavenly bread" which he sought was a scarce article. Perhaps he was unreasonable. In his estimates of men there was not a little of that "serene insolence" which Barrett Wendell spoke of. And yet his ability "to know a good man when he saw one," which William James considered the genuine mark of an educated person, was remarkable. To his matured evaluation of Wordsworth, Carlyle, Coleridge, Tennyson, there is little to add or take away.

There can be no doubt that the theme and general drift of his first book (*Nature*) was present in his mind all during his European journey. Certainly he was writing it down before he left Liverpool, and throughout his tour he seems to have been quite as eager to visit botanical gardens, museums of natural history, and men of science as to visit architectural and artistic relics and literary men. In Liverpool, too, he prepared a lecture on Natural History, to be delivered in Boston in November of the same year.

He landed in New York, October 9th, and proceeded to Newton Upper Falls (or Newtowne, as he calls it), to join his mother, who was living there with a relative. He immediately took up sporadic preaching, in New Bedford, Plymouth, Bangor, and began to experiment in the lecturing which was to be his main source of income for the remainder of his life. His

first lecture subjects were "Water," "The Naturalist," and "Italy"; with, some months later, a course on "Biography," which he treated under the heads of "Tests of Great Men," "Michelangelo," "Luther," "George Fox," "Milton," and "Edmund Burke." Early in 1834 he was chosen Phi Beta Kappa poet for the annual meeting at Cambridge, incorporating in his Poem eulogies of Lafayette and Webster.

On the subject of his lectures, according to his son he used to say: "When a village Lyceum Committee asks me to give a lecture, and I tell them I will read one I am just writing, they are pleased. Poor men, they little know how different that lecture will be when it is given in New York, or is printed. I 'try it' on them; *'The barber learns his trade on the orphan's chin.'* " Nothing pleased him more than to come upon a shrewd observation or proverbial saying put in humorous guise, like this one from the Arabian.

But though he was trying his wings as a public speaker, he was primarily engaged in attuning his soul to nature, repeating in the fields about the Newtons the solitary walks of the earlier days at Canterbury. One is amused to find that he is botanizing enthusiastically, even identifying flowers by their Latin names. "A whole bed of *Hepatica triloba,* cousins of the Anemone," he records in April, and "To-day I found in Roxbury the *Saxifraga vernalis.*" It has been repeatedly said that his interest in natural history was the fruit of his friendship with Thoreau, and that he had no eye for the details of either the landscape or its creatures; but a reference to the Journals of 1834 will convince any-

one that he had already developed a poet's instinct for fact and could register impressions with an accuracy that Thoreau would not have been ashamed of. In this year Thoreau was a sophomore at Harvard.

"After much wandering and seeing many things," we read, in the Journal for April 11th, "four snakes gliding up and down a hollow for no purpose that I could see—not to eat, not for love, but only gliding; then a whole bed of *Hepatica triloba,* cousins of the Anemone, all blue and beautiful, but constrained by niggard nature to wear their last year's jacket of leaves; then a black-capped titmouse, who came upon a tree, and when I would know his name, sang *chick-a-dee-dee;* then a far-off tree full of clamorous birds, I know not what. . . . I forsook the tombs, and found a sunny hollow where the east wind would not blow, and lay down against the side of a tree to most happy beholdings. At least I opened my eyes and let what would pass through them into my soul. . . . The pines glittered with their innumerable green needles in the light, and seemed to challenge me to read their riddle. The drab oak-leaves of the last year turned their little somersets and lay still again. And the wind bustled high overhead in the forest top. This gay and grand architecture, from the vault to the moss and lichen on which I lay—who shall explain to me the laws of its proportions and adornments?" Later in the month he declares that "Natural History gives *body* to our knowledge. No man can spare a fact he knows. The knowledge of nature is *most permanent;* clouds and grass are older antiquities than pyramids or Athens;

then they are *most perfect.*" And in May, "What, my friend, are you" (*i.e.,* himself) "not yet convinced that you should study plants and animals? . . . No knowledge can be spared . . . and this is the knowledge of the laws by which I live; therefore . . . say that you love Nature, and would know her mysteries, and that you believe in your power by patient contemplation and docile experiment to learn them."

He was naturally worried about his future and may have dreamed that a church would be established in which he might preach and act "according to his lights." In 1833, in a sermon delivered at his old church in Boston, he declared that "there is a revolution of religious opinion taking effect around us, as it seems to me the greatest of all revolutions which have ever occurred; that, namely, which has separated the individual from the whole world, and made him demand a faith satisfactory to his own proper nature, whose full extent he now for the first time contemplates. A little while ago men were supposed to be saved or lost as one race. . . . But now . . . man begins to hear a voice that fills the heavens and the earth, saying that God is within him; that *there* is the celestial host. I find this amazing revelation of my immediate relation to God a solution of all the doubts that oppressed me. . . . It is the perception of this depth in human nature, this infinitude belonging to every man that has been born, which has given new value to the habits of reflection and solitude. In this doctrine, as deeply felt by him, is the key by which the words that fell from Christ upon the character of

God can alone be well and truly explained: 'The Father is in me: I am in the Father, yet the Father is greater than I.' "

In New Bedford, whither in 1834 he went often to preach, he found himself among a community of Quakers and was much impressed by their beliefs. With one member especially, Mary Rotch, he had many long discussions, retaining all his life a memory of her as a noble and devout woman. He also dreamed of gathering his entire family in a retreat in the Berkshires, and Edward, still patiently awaiting health in Porto Rico, and Charles were both eager to join him in the project. But it came to nothing, for on October 1st Edward died of tuberculosis, the news reaching Waldo on the 18th. They were the nearest of age of the five brothers, and many of their contemporaries considered Edward by far the more brilliant. But Edward himself knew better. "Yes," he once observed, "they say much of me, but I tell them the real lion of the tribe of Judah is at home."

During the preceding summer Emerson had ridden on the Boston & Worcester Railroad, the first to be constructed in New England, noting that a countryman had called the engine "Hell in harness." He had visited the menagerie, had read *Wilhelm Meister* with delight, had determined to devote himself to the learning of languages and had then determined not to, had reread Shakespeare, with renewed satisfaction, and De Staël's *I Promessi Sposi* with approval, and had magnanimously listened to the sermons of various brother ministers every Sunday.

But his main concern during this and the following year was to acquaint himself with the various sciences. As a youth, according to Dr. Holmes, "he looked askance at science"; but now, although his attitude was still that of a poet rather than that of a scientist, he read De Candolle, Sprengel, and Cuvier, and filled pages of his notebooks with citations from books on chemistry and meteorology. He was familiar with the theories of Lamarck and eagerly embraced the idea of evolution as this was popularly known before Darwin. Dr. Cabot quotes a noteworthy passage from a lecture: "The most surprising, I may say the most sublime fact is that man is no upstart in the creation, but has been prophesied in nature for a thousand ages before he appeared; that, from times incalculably remote, there has been a progressive preparation for him, an effort to produce him; the meaner creatures containing the elements of his structure and pointing at it from every side. . . . His limbs are only a more exquisite organization—say rather the finish—of the rudimental forms that have been already sweeping the sea and creeping in the mud: the brother of his hand is even now cleaving the Arctic Sea in the fin of the whale, and innumerable ages since was pawing the marsh in the flipper of the saurian."

He saw in the study of science a possible cure for the national fault of imitativeness, "for the study of things leads us back to truth." "But," he adds wisely, "as books can never teach us the use of books, neither does science, when it becomes technical, keep its own place in the mind. . . . The poet loses himself in

imaginations, and for want of accuracy, is a mere fabulist. The *savant,* on the other hand, losing sight of the end of his inquiries in the perfection of his manipulations, becomes an apothecary, a pedant. I fully believe in both, in the poetry and in the dissection. Accuracy then that we may really know something; but under the guidance of the pious sentiment of curiosity to understand ourselves and the whole."

In October, he and his mother went, at Dr. Ripley's invitation, to live in the Manse at Concord, and there they resided until a year later when, in September, he married Miss Lydia (or Lidian, as she later was known) Jackson, of Plymouth, and found it necessary to purchase a house of his own. He had hoped to build on "grandfather's hill, facing Wachusett, Monadnoc, and the setting sun," but was forced to content himself with the Coolidge house, on low ground near a brook, tributary of the Concord River. "A mean place," he called it, for it lacked trees and flowers and any extended prospect except toward the Lincoln hills to the east. But it had open ground about it, and at the rear a pathway to Walden and the Cliff, his favourite walks. The house itself, which cost thirty-five hundred dollars, was a square, well-proportioned mansion, of the type of which three or four are to be seen in every old New England village. Here he spent the rest of his days.

In a letter to Miss Jackson, he spoke of himself as a poet—"of a low class, without doubt, yet a poet. That is my nature and vocation. My singing, to be sure, is very husky, and is for the most part in prose.

Still I am a poet in the sense of a perceiver and dear lover of the harmonies that are in the soul and in matter, and specially of the correspondences between these and those. A sunset, a forest, a snow-storm, a certain river-view, are more to me than many friends, and do ordinarily divide my day with my books. Wherever I go, therefore, I guard and study my rambling propensities." The phrase, "the harmonies that are in the soul and in matter, and specially the correspondences between these and those," is very interesting as giving in a nutshell his conception of poetry. It is one with that of the idealists of all time.

> From their gross Matter she [the soul] abstracts the Forms
> And draws a kind of Quintessence from things,
> Which to her proper nature she transforms
> To bear them light on her celestial wings.
> This doth She when from things particular
> She doth abstract the Universal kinds.

So Sir John Davies; and Shelley: a poem

> is the erection of actions according to the unchangeable forms of human nature, as existing in the mind of the Creator, which is itself the image of all other minds.

And Quiller-Couch:

> There are certain men . . . of more delicate mental fibre than their fellows; men whose minds have as it were exquisite filaments which they throw out to intercept, *apprehend* and conduct home to Man starry messages between the outer mystery of the Universe and the inner mystery of his soul; even as modern telegraphy has learnt to search out, snatch and gather home messages wandering astray over waste waters of the Ocean. Such men are the poets.

Emerson was thirty-one when he settled in Concord. He was by no means a stranger in the town, for he

had visited too often at the Manse not to be known, though his intimate friends were still in Boston. Mr. Van Wyck Brooks, in his recently published delightful book, *Emerson and Others,* describes him as at this time: "tall, erect, light-footed and strong of limb, with his long neck and his bright blue eyes peering about, one shoulder slightly higher than the other." That he was already what is known as a magnetic personality is proved by a hundred testimonies of those who met him. One feels that he knows at last that the ground is firm beneath his feet. A quiet enthusiasm marks his manner. He finds the world exciting. He wishes to make every minute count. When he is not reading, lecturing, preaching, or rambling in the woods, he takes the stage to Boston and visits picture galleries, bookshops, concerts, or the houses of friends, or merely strolls in the streets or on the Common. Dr. Nathaniel Peabody's bookshop, in the front parlour of his house, is his favourite haunt, because there he can see all the latest foreign books and meet all the most interesting persons: Washington Allston, Dr. Channing, George Ripley, Rev. Mr. Hedge, Horace Mann, Hawthorne, and—Margaret Fuller! Or he can wander down to the water front and in at the Seaman's Bethel, and listen to Father Taylor, admired of Dickens and Melville. Or he may drop in at the Masonic Temple, on Tremont Street, to observe the workings of a remarkable new school conducted by a strange genius, Bronson Alcott.[1]

[1]The most complete account of Alcott as schoolmaster is *The Father of Little Women,* by Honoré Willsie Morrow, 1927.

We have not space here to trace Alcott's picturesque history before he came to Boston. He arrived from Philadelphia, at the suggestion of Channing, with his head full of ideas that the world was not ready for. Encouraged by various Unitarian and Transcendental leaders of thought in Boston, he opened his school in the finest rooms obtainable and gathered a small staff of teachers "of the highest intellectual order." His main assistant was Elizabeth Peabody, who, thirty years later, was to introduce the kindergarten to America. Her sisters, Sophia, who married Hawthorne, and Mary, who married Horace Mann, were instructors; Washington Allston directed the art work; Mrs. Alcott taught music; and Margaret Fuller came in intermittently. The schoolroom, as described by Alcott himself, was filled "with the appropriate emblems of intellectual and spiritual life." Paintings, busts, books, and "not inelegant furniture" were everywhere. His purpose was "to bring external circumstances into harmony with that serenity of spirit and vivacity of portraiture which are the native attributes of unspoiled childhood." By October 11, 1834, he had thirty-four pupils. The mainspring of his system he expressed in the motto, "Obey and know"; but his purpose was to educate the "heart" first and the head afterward. "Influence this and the whole being feels the touch." "*Faith* imparts energy, growth, productiveness, to every germ of man's nature."

It is no wonder that Emerson was profoundly interested in the man. In the school, as Mr. Brooks says, "was no suggestion of painful tasks, routine, irritation,

severity. This teacher, with his dialectic method of query and answer, was a Socrates indeed, for whom questions of thought and taste were independent of age. He was like the sun in April warming into life a hive of torpid bees." Emerson "could read his Plato now with new eyes, for here was a Plato in the flesh."

Of course, with all his inspired anticipations of what is now called progressive education and his undoubted glimpses of wisdom, Alcott's style and manner were against him. His monologues had the eternity without the light sparkles of Coleridge's, his written words were often pedantic, trite, and vague to distraction, his inability to recognize facts maddening. And yet he possessed a genius which Emerson was quick to perceive, though the world is only now beginning to do so.

The year 1836 saw the publication in America of two little books of quite explosive quality, though their earliest detonations were so mild as to suggest Bottom's "I'll roar you an 'twere the nightingale." The books were Carlyle's *Sartor Resartus* and Emerson's *Nature*.

Le Baron Russell, who was more than once to prove a rare friend to Emerson, made it his business to procure the publication of an edition (the first complete edition) of *Sartor,* to which Emerson contributed an introduction. He dealt politely enough with the book here, but in private he found the style excessive and the work as a whole "cold" compared with his memory of his friend. He could not, however, fail to be pleased with a transcendental philosophy, to which, by his own road, he had attained long since.

Two years previously had begun that correspondence with Carlyle which, with some surface frictions but with fundamental affection, continued so long. It has many times been observed that the friendship of these two men was fortunate in that it was a long-distance friendship, such as could better survive correspondence than endure personal contact; for, however much they may have agreed in their premises, they were in their conclusions, especially regarding society, simply as far apart as optimist and pessimist.

Sartor Resartus certainly gave popular currency, in England and America, to the word "transcendental." The word and the ideas associated with it were, however, well known in the neighbourhood of Boston, and much has been made of the influence of the transcendental movement upon Emerson and upon *Nature*. I am unable to convince myself that it was important, even though it is true that he was one of the founders of the Transcendental Club (1836) and was always discreetly sympathetic with the movement, as representing a revolt against formalism of all sorts and an expansion of literary horizons.

"I told Mr. M——," he once said, "that he need not consult the Germans, but if he wished at any time to know what the Transcendentalists believed, he might simply omit what in his own mind he added [to simple perception] from the tradition, and the rest would be Transcendentalism." Here he quite correctly states the central idea (as far as any can be discerned) of the new faith, made in Germany, that set Boston agog in the 'thirties; but for a more detailed exposition the

reader should refer to the lecture, "The Transcendentalist," which is one of the best discussions that we have.

Kant said that the transcendental is the world of things-in-themselves, as being outside the limits of experience—all those elements of human reason which regulate experience, though they themselves are beyond experience; such as the categories of time, space, causality, and so forth. For Carlyle the discovery of this extra-experiential world had come with the force of a revelation, and he made fine play with the "elements" in *Sartor*. "That Where and When, so mysteriously inseparable from all our thoughts, are but superficial adhesions to thought." "Think well, thou wilt find that Space is but a mode of our human Sense, so likewise Time; there *is* no Space and no Time: We are—we know not what;—light-sparkles floating in the ether of eternity." "This so solid-seeming World, after all, were but an air-image, our Me the only reality; and Nature, with its thousandfold production and destruction, but the reflex of our own inward Force, the 'phantasy of our Dream.' "

Such sentences, though in a different idiom, can be matched many times in *Nature*. One might almost say that Emerson was born with a perception of the relativity of Where and When, and of the dubious externality of the "outward world." For Carlyle, as I have said, Kantian transcendentalism arrived with the impact of a revelation, and it may have done so for Emerson; but there is no evidence that it did. One Kantian distinction which, whether it was sound or not,

was handy, he welcomed: the distinction between the Understanding (*Verstand*) and the Reason (*Vernunft*), or, as Carlyle puts it, "our Logical, Mensurative faculty" and our "Fantasy or Imagination." The understanding, it was supposed, takes care of the ordinary business of life, puts two and two together, while the reason applies itself to the seizure of absolute truth. The distinction was valuable to Emerson, and he received it with enthusiasm, because, now that he had relinquished all inspired books and churchly authority, he naturally welcomed the conception of a *faculty* of the spirit—the Reason—that could take their place as a means or instrument of revelation. Whenever he speaks of "that which is within," "the inward voice," etc., he is thinking not so much of the conscience in the traditional religious sense as of this incorruptible and undeceivable faculty which intuitively recognizes truth.

Carlyle, once more, had proclaimed that Reason perceives that all material things (*i.e.,* nature) are *symbols* of things spiritual. The Understanding uses the same things as "extrinsic" or literal symbols that the Reason uses as "intrinsic" or figurative. Nature, which to the utilitarian eye is an infinite congeries of symbols subserving our "mensurative, logical faculty," is to the eye of imagination or Reason "the visible garment or vesture of God."

By 1836 these ideas had become almost platitudinous among the illuminati of Boston. We are not, however, concerned here with a history of what Barrett Wendell calls "that outbreak of intellectual and spiritual

anarchy," except in so far as it impinged upon Emerson's orbit. It is, however, important to remember that the movement was a natural or wayward child of the older Puritanism, in that both concentrated their efforts upon perceiving truths that lie definitely beyond the range of ordinary perception. Its weakness—too often, its silliness—lay in its enthusiasm for undemonstrable truth; and the depression of spirit that its devotees felt, often enough, after an evening of idealistic discussion, was the result of a realization that they had got nowhere. That inward something, the Reason, that alone could recognize truths intuitively, had a bad habit of working differently in different persons.

In these solemn and affected, though at bottom sincere, conclaves, Emerson usually sat in a corner and said nothing, reminding one of a wise fowl that lets the others storm the dish and hovers round the outskirts picking up choice morsels. He saw perfectly well the futility of talking without facts, but he also saw that many a wise saying is struck out in the heat of talking about nothing at all. He was unshaken in his belief that noumenon is the only reality but, as he said, he had no grudge against matter or phenomenon, because he found it fascinating. Besides, was not phenomenon still the symbol of the divine? He seldom wrote as his friends talked—in "The Over-Soul," perhaps, and in "Spiritual Laws"—but not often did he indulge in idealistic jargon, and less and less as he grew older. He was entirely willing, however, that his friends should say whatever they pleased: indeed, he

had no stronger conviction than that each man should feel, think, act, speak, as he chose, so long as it was sincere.

It should be remembered, too, that he did not consider himself in any precise sense a transcendentalist. "He ridiculed the impression," says Sir Leslie Stephen, "that his transcendentalism was a known and fixed element, like salt or meal, a rigid, definite creed. All the argument and all the wisdom, he declares, is not in the treatise on metaphysics, but in the sonnet or the play"; and Dr. E. W. Emerson has pointed out that in the series of lectures entitled *The Times* (1841–1842), the lecture, "The Poet," was inserted between "The Conservative" and "The Transcendentalist" as a "golden mean between two extremes." Emerson constantly uses the word "transcendental" in contexts where a contemporary writer would use the word "radical," and he preferred to call his philosophy the Ideal Theory. He never tired of declaring himself a poet. "I am, in all my theory, ethics, and politics a poet."

The lecture on the Transcendentalist deals with its subject with a "light hand," a very measured sympathy; and, although it contains one of the clearest expositions of the meaning of transcendentalism, it also contains a generalized portrait of a transcendentalist that reads almost like a burlesque. In his Journal of this time he recorded his conviction that in "these children," as he called the members of the cult, the sublime and the ridiculous often met. "Could they not die? or succeed? or help themselves? or draw others? or draw me? or

offend me? in any manner, I care not how, could they not be disposed of and cease to hang there in the horizon, an unsettled appearance, too great to be neglected, and not great enough to be of any aid or comfort to this great craving humanity?" But these were passing irritations. For the most part, he found a place for the talking dreamers or dreaming talkers in his cosmos. With their eyes fixed on eternity and the infinite, they might still be useful, even to busy men —"to compare the points of our spiritual compass, and verify our bearings from superior chronometers."

Nature was recognized by Carlyle, Lowell, Holmes, to be a prose poem, but some critics saw in it only a "disordered dream," and some a dangerous book. As we have seen, the idea of the essay had been in his mind for several years, though the last three chapters were written at Concord. Published in September, 1836, anonymously, it found almost no sale; indeed, only five hundred copies were sold in twelve years.

The "little azure-coloured *Nature,*" as Carlyle called it, is not a disquisition but a poetic meditation, rising into rhapsody—the "most intense and quintessential of his writings," in the estimation of Edward Garnett. Just as in *Sartor* Carlyle said in brief almost everything that he was to spend his life in saying at length, so in *Nature* Emerson epitomized his view of life and the world. It is written, however, with a fire, a fluidity, and a lyricism that he was seldom to equal again.

His main purpose is to present a theory: that the secret of nature or creation will be discovered by no

one who divorces nature and man, but only by him who perceives their harmony or unity. He waives all argument whether the theory is valid: "whenever a theory appears, it will be its own evidence; its test is that it will explain all phenomena." Although he does not explain the steps by which he has attained to his generalization, it is easy to guess them. His Journal gives the key. He had come to the conclusion that science, by assuming the existence of matter and by, for technical purposes, ignoring spirit, could never reach ultimate truth; and that religion, by ignoring matter and limiting its speculations to spirit, was in the same case. A theory was needed that took account of both, and one, moreover, that did not rest on any assumption that man and nature, or spirit and matter, were hostile. Not man *or* nature, but man *and* nature, a wedding of the two, was his principle, and he found a means to such a reconciliation in idealism or, as he called it, the Ideal Theory.

Beginning with a characteristic plea for intellectual independence, he next boldly declares that "undoubtedly we have no questions to ask which are unanswerable. We must trust to the perfection of the creation so far as to believe that whatever curiosity the order of things has awakened in our minds, the order of things can satisfy." "Let us inquire, to what end is nature?"

So much by way of introduction. In the body of the essay he begins by urging the *values* of nature as distinguished from its *uses*—the idea expressed in the poem, "Each and All." "The charming landscape which I saw this morning is indubitably made

up of some twenty or thirty farms. Miller owns this field, Locke that, Manning the woodland beyond. But none of them owns the landscape. There is a property in the horizon which no man has but he whose eye can integrate all the parts, that is, the poet." But "few adult persons can see nature. Most persons do not see the sun." "For the lover of nature is he whose inward and outward senses are still truly adjusted to each other; who has retained the spirit of infancy even into the era of manhood." "In the presence of nature a wild delight runs through the man, in spite of real sorrows. Nature says—he is my creature, and maugre all his impertinent griefs, he shall be glad with me." "Standing on the bare ground—my head bathed by the blithe air and uplifted into infinite space—all mean egotism vanishes. I become a transparent eyeball; I am nothing; I see all; the currents of the Universal Being circulate through me; I am part and parcel of God." "Yet it is certain that the power to produce this delight does not reside in nature, but in man, or in a harmony of both."

The rest of the book is divided into seven parts: "Commodity," "Beauty," "Language," "Discipline," "Idealism," "Spirit," and "Prospects." The first four represent the classes into which all the uses and values of nature may be put—the effect of nature upon the soul; the last three, the operation of man's spirit upon Nature, or the interaction of both.

By "commodities" he means all the obvious "advantages which our senses owe to nature, low, but perfect in their kind"—all the utilities, conveniences, and

comforts which directly or by means of the useful arts she confers upon man, the ingenious and mercenary. The section, "Discipline," discusses the no less obvious influence of nature in educating the intellect, the moral sense, and the will. These need not detain us. But in "Beauty" and "Language" he strikes a higher key.

The section entitled "Beauty," is warmly coloured, vibrant with feeling, richly illustrated. One reads parts of it with a kind of rapture. Surely never was he more inspired. "I see the spectacle of morning from the hill-top over against my house, from daybreak to sunrise, with emotions which an angel might share. The long slender bars of cloud float like fishes in the sea of crimson light. From the earth, as a shore, I look out into that silent sea. I seem to partake its rapid transformations; the active enchantment reaches my dust, and I dilate and conspire with the morning wind. How does Nature deify us with a few and cheap elements! Give me health and a day, and I will make the pomp of emperors ridiculous. The dawn is my Assyria; the sunset and moonrise my Paphos, and unimaginable realms of faërie; broad noon shall be my England of the sense and the understanding; the night shall be my Germany of mystic philosophy and dreams." It is only one of a score of passages as poetic. Since the Seventeenth Century but a few men have written such prose.

Beauty, he says, appeals to the senses, the intellect, the spirit. "The world exists to the soul to satisfy the desire for beauty. This element I call an ultimate end." Here is the thought of the poem, "The Rhodora." "No reason can be asked or given why the soul seeks

Beauty. Beauty, in its largest and profoundest sense, is one expression of the universe. God is the all-fair. Truth, and goodness, and beauty, are but different faces of the same All. But beauty in nature is not ultimate. It is the herald of inward and eternal beauty, and is not alone a solid and satisfactory good. It must stand as a part, and not yet as the last or highest expression of the final cause of Nature." But more important than such idealistic asseverations (which drive some æstheticians mad) is the emotional fervour, the aching love of beauty, that shines in every line of this pæan.

The section, "Language," in very much the spirit of parts of *Sartor Resartus,* though less picturesquely, develops the idea of nature as the symbol of the divine. The discussion proceeds by three steps: (1) words are the symbols of things; (2) natural facts are symbols of spiritual facts; and (3) nature is the symbol of spirit. Here for the first time the homely style, so familiar in his later writing, is amusingly exemplified in such lines as: "How great a language to convey such pepper-corn informations"; "Whilst we use this grand cipher to expedite the affairs of our pot and kettle"; "We are like travellers using the cinders of a volcano to roast our eggs."

But the drift is lofty enough. "Man is an analogist, and studies relations in all objects. He is placed in the centre of beings, and a ray of relation passes from every other being into him. And neither can these be understood without these objects, nor these objects without man." This last is a terse statement of the

thesis of the entire essay, and leads immediately to the final affirmation: "A Fact is the end or last issue of spirit. The visible creation is the terminus or the circumference of the invisible world."

He admits that the "doctrine is abstruse," but declares that it becomes clear to a mind properly prepared. " 'Every scripture is to be interpreted in the same spirit which gave it forth'—is the fundamental law of criticism. A life in harmony with Nature, and the love of truth and of virtue, will purge the eyes to understand her text." A belief in the Ideal Theory therefore implies an ethical discipline. "A man's power to connect his thought with its proper symbol, and so to utter it, depends on the simplicity of his character, that is, upon his love of truth and his desire to communicate it without loss. . . . Picturesque language is at once a commanding certificate that he who employs it is a man in alliance with truth and God." Then follows a discussion of one of his favourite ideas, that the use of metaphor, as a result of deep feeling, is a mark of man's instinctive idealism.

One approaches the next two sections, on Idealism and Spirit, with a feeling of temerity, because of their abstractness. I have tried to summarize the ideas they contain in my Introduction. The line of thought here is that the illusions of the senses, the speculations of scientists, the intuitions of philosophers and poets, all suggest a doubt of the independent existence of matter, "all tend to affect our convictions of the reality of the external world." But Emerson, though he may theoretically rule matter out of independent existence, still

loves it. "I have no hostility to nature, but a child's love to it. I expand and live in the warm day like corn and melons. Let us speak her fair. I do not wish to fling stones at my beautiful mother, nor soil my gentle nest." He wishes only to put her in her place. "The noblest ministry of nature is to stand as the apparition of God. It is the organ through which the universal spirit speaks to the individual, and strives to lead back the individual to it."

He has reached the eternal paradox of the one and the many, and he makes no attempt to solve it. He is fully aware that a complete transcendentalism leads to a horrible vacancy. That way madness lies. On this point Professor Santayana has written as follows, in *Poetry and Religion*:

> What is impossible is to be a transcendentalist "all 'round." In that case there would be nothing left to transcend; the civil war of the mind would have ended in the extermination of all parties. *The art of mysticism is to be mystical in spots* and to aim the heavy guns of your transcendental philosophy against those realities or those ideas which you find particularly galling.

His entire essay on "Understanding, Imagination, and Mysticism" is very enlightening in this connection.

Emerson has been roundly scolded because he did not carry his theories to their logical conclusions. But it is evident that his theories, if so carried out, would lead him into various blind alleys, and he preferred to leave them before he got into logical difficulties. He was a little troubled by the question of the human body. If nature is but the symbol of God, what is the body? It is, he says, the only part of nature over which

the spirit has incessant control. "The world proceeds from the same spirit as the body of man. It is a remoter and inferior incarnation of God, a projection of God in the unconscious. But it differs from the body in one important respect. It is not, like that, now subject to the human will. Its serene order is inviolable by us. It is, therefore, to us, the present expositor of the divine mind."

The ideal theory is a pleasing and convenient hypothesis to "account for nature by other principles than those of carpentry and chemistry. Yet, if it only deny the existence of matter it does not satisfy the demands of the spirit. It leaves God out of *me*. It leaves me in the splendid labyrinth of my perceptions, to wander without end. Then the heart resists it, because it baulks the affections in denying substantive being to men and women. Nature is so pervaded with human life that there is something of humanity in all and in every particular. But this theory makes nature foreign to me, and does not account for that consanguinity which we acknowledge to it." "Let it stand then, merely as a useful introductory hypothesis, serving to apprise us of the eternal distinction between the soul and the world." That this is an extremely important apprisal, and one to which man owes most of what is noblest in him, no one can deny.

Nature is obviously "dated." It could hardly have been written by a man who had not been born in New England in the early Nineteenth Century. Back of it lies the whole romantic movement, and its mood is that of what may be called the pre-biological era. Two

omissions become notable in retrospect: there is no reference to *natura maligna,* except on the last page, and that is pure Christian Science; and there is a complete obliteration of that distinction between nature and human nature which has been the basis of many systems of morals.

In ignoring the maleficent in nature, Emerson parts company with Carlyle and, in ignoring the distinction between nature and human nature, he parts company with John Stuart Mill. When Margaret Fuller exclaimed ecstatically, "I accept the universe," Carlyle growled, "Gad, you'd better." He possessed the romantic belief in Nature, too, but he had no notion that she never did betray the heart that loved her. His idea was that she treated man like a Scotch dominie, thrashing him for the good of his soul.

As for the relations of nature and human nature, though Emerson, as we have seen, glances at it, he does so only to veer off and take refuge in dilemma. No theory of the survival of the fittest had as yet been promulgated to give him such nightmares as visited the later Victorians. "Nature, red in tooth and claw with ravin," did not loom as a spectre on his horizon, nor did he feel inclined to ask

> Are God and Nature then at strife,
> That Nature lends such evil dreams?

Mill, in his essay, *Nature* (1858), which might be read as a complement to Emerson's, presented the realist's point of view and made due allowance in his ethical theory for that apparent malignancy of nature which

science revealed, but to which Emerson was at this time apparently blind or at least immune. Many harassed souls cannot forgive Emerson his optimism.

And yet, whatever its omissions, obscurities, and extravagances, *Nature* is still a noble poem. In attempting even so much interpretation as I have done, I may have been too much like that professor mentioned by Holmes who, in his attempt to understand the book, "resembled a sagacious pointer making the acquaintance of a box-tortoise." I hope not. The little book represents a great emotional experience, and its virtue lies in its power to give the reader, especially the young reader, an experience commensurate with the author's. Like *Sartor,* it should be read first when one is, say, twenty years old.

CHAPTER SIX

Concord, 1836–1841

I

IT SEEMS to have been in 1831 that Emerson first met Margaret Fuller. He thus described the impression she made upon him at first view: "She was then twenty-six years old. She had a face and frame that would indicate fulness and tenacity of life. She was rather under the middle height; her complexion was fair, with strong fair hair. She was then, as always, carefully and becomingly dressed, and of ladylike self-possession. For the rest her appearance had nothing prepossessing. Her extreme plainness, a trick of incessantly opening and shutting her eyelids, the nasal tone of her voice, all repelled; and I said to myself we shall never get far." Together with "inordinate self-esteem," however, she had a remarkable depth and breadth of sympathy. Children are said to have found her irresistible. She used occasionally to visit the Emersons on Sunday and speak to a Bible class which Mrs. Emerson conducted; and she was always received with enthusiasm. Among those who did not know her well she was an object of dislike and often of ridicule, as women of dominant personality are likely to be, but to her admirers she was a priestess and sibyl. Her peculiarities were, as she herself said, the fruit of a

forced education; for her father "made the mistake of thinking to gain time by bringing forward the intellect as early as possible, the consequence being a premature development of brain that made her a youthful prodigy by day, and by night a victim of spectral illusions, nightmare, and somnambulism."

In 1835 she moved from her birthplace, Cambridgeport, to Boston as a teacher of languages, and in 1837 to Providence, where she taught until 1839. From this year until 1844 she resided near Boston, forming friendships with the Brook Farm group, especially with Alcott, Emerson, Hawthorne, and W. H. Channing. In 1840, aided by Emerson and George Ripley, she founded the *Dial,* which she edited for two years, meanwhile carrying on "conversation classes for ladies, in Boston, in which philosophical and social subjects were discussed with a somewhat over-accentuated earnestness." With her removal to New York, in 1844, her immediate connection with our subject ends, though her marriage to the Marquis Giovanni Angelo Ossoli, her work as nurse in Rome during the siege in 1848, and her tragic death by drowning in 1850 of course excited unfailing curiosity and sympathy in the purlieus of Boston.

In intellect she was knowing, smart, and eccentric rather than profound. Her relations with Emerson are full of comedy, reminding one of an irresistible force meeting an immovable body. He anticipated her visits to his home with a "slight shudder." He was, as always, ready to admire ardency and good-will, but, although he saw her constantly during the years of

their association, he was never able to blossom brightly or warmly in her presence. On her part, she felt abashed in the presence of his "provoking equilibrium" (one can sympathize with her in this), and longed "to teach this sage all he wants to make him the full-fledged angel, to make him forego these tedious, tedious attempts to learn the universe by thought alone." He apologized almost humbly for his reserve, but diffidently protested that "ice has its uses, when deception is not thought of and we are not looking for bread." But it should not try to pass itself off as "glass, or gelatine."

He could get little from her, but he got much from Amos Bronson Alcott; though whether what he received from the latter was entirely valuable may be open to question. Alcott was neither the fool in God that some have pictured nor the irresponsible dreamer tradition has called him. His early life was surprisingly adventurous, and his contacts with the world and its hazards far superior to Emerson's. Besides, the passion of his life, education of children, whatever may have been the philosophy that lay behind it, was singularly definite and simple and, in the hands of the right sort of teacher, both practicable and sound—for the right sort of children. And yet, intellectually, he is figured in those cherubs that gaze out of old pictures, that are all wings and head and no bottom. If Emerson was a mountain that entered the clouds but was deeply grounded in earth, Alcott was a flying island of Laputa, which settled down only once in a while. Carlyle called him "a kind of venerable Don Quixote, whom nobody

can laugh at without loving." Emerson's summary is most sententious: "A tedious Archangel."

When we seek to discover just what it was that Emerson got from him, we are a little puzzled. Certainly, not ideas. I think that he admired Alcott (and he was fully aware of his limits), because he found in him an example, almost unique, of faith in the ideal. In this man was not the shadow of turning; he never thought even of defending the "ideal philosophy"; he assumed it, and went ahead. And to a man of Emerson's darting, searching, weighing, and selecting—in short, critical—mind, Alcott was a priceless pole, steady as Polaris itself amid the vicissitudes of speculation.

As for Hawthorne, who was Emerson's townsman, in the Old Manse, at the other end of the village, between 1842 and 1846, there is no question of influence one way or the other. Hawthorne admired Emerson: "He was," he said, "so simple, so quiet, without pretension, encountering each man alive as if expecting to receive more than he would impart. . . . It is impossible to dwell in his vicinity without inhaling more or less the mountain atmosphere of his lofty thought." On more than one occasion they went for long walks together, but could never have talked on equal terms because, as Mr. Cabot says, they "interdespised each other's moonshine." And Emerson disliked Hawthorne's books and frankly said so. Years before he had said of Sir Thomas Browne that every line smelled of the charnel, and in like manner his sunny spirit was provoked and abashed by what

seemed to him Hawthorne's morbidity. But personally he liked and respected the younger man. "I do not," he said, "think any of his books worthy of his genius. I admired the man, who was simple, amiable, truth-loving, and frank in conversation, but I never read any of his books with pleasure; they are too young."

Two other young men, however, were not "too young." Thoreau graduated in 1837 and, though Emerson had been aware of his existence before, it was from his return to Concord that their association dated, which lasted till his death in 1862. Recent biographers have sought to correct the contemporary impression that young Henry imitated Emerson, not only in carriage and way of speaking, but in convictions. What more natural than that he should have done so for a while? But to say that he was "a little Emerson," as more than one of his earlier critics intimated, is ridiculous. Nowadays he is attracting quite as much attention as his fellow-idealist. Certainly he has come into a fulness of fame that few of his own day would have prophesied.

His references to Emerson in his Journal[1] are few. In 1852, he writes:

> I doubt if Emerson could trundle a wheelbarrow through the streets, because it would be out of character. One needs to have a comprehensive character.

Ten years earlier, he had recorded this estimate:

> Emerson again is a critic, poet, philosopher, with talent not so conspicuous, not so adequate to his task [as Carlyle's]; but his

[1]Thoreau's Journals were published in fourteen volumes in 1906; *The Heart of Thoreau's Journals,* edited by Odell Shepard, in 1927.

field is still higher, his task more arduous. Lives a far more intense life; seeks to realize a divine life; his affections and intellect equally developed. Has advanced farther and a new heaven opens to him. . . . The life of an Artist; more variegated, more observing, finer perception; not so robust, elastic; practical enough in his own field; faithful, a judge of men. There is no such general critic of men and things, no such trustworthy and faithful man. More of the divine realized in him than in any. A poet critic, reserving the unqualified nouns for the gods. . . .

. . . The divine in man has no more easy, methodically distinct expression. His personal influence upon young persons greater than any man's. In his world every man would be a poet, Love would reign, Beauty would take place, Man and Nature would harmonize.

Years later his admiration showed some faltering, but by that time each man had set in his bias. At first, each was fascinated by certain qualities in the other: Emerson, by Thoreau's freshness and independence; Thoreau, by Emerson's lofty serenity. Later Thoreau's independence may have come to seem stiff-necked; Emerson's serenity, indifference. But in 1838, Emerson was delighted: "I delight in my young friend, who seems to have as free and erect a mind as any I have met. . . . My good Henry Thoreau made this else solitary afternoon sunny with his simplicity and clear perception. How comic is simplicity in this double-dealing, quacking world. Everything that boy says makes merry with society, though nothing can be graver than his meaning."

The Emersonian core in Thoreau's philosophy was the principle of self-dependence. If things were in the saddle for other Americans, he was determined that they should not be for him, and his life was one deter-

mined experiment in getting on without the "adventitious wrappages" of custom. He valued the moment; he valued "values"; he valued instinct; he sought and perhaps found a reconciliation of spirit and nature. The deficiency in his transcendental philosophy was, if I interpret Mr. J. Brooks Atkinson's recent excellent study of him rightly, his "distrust of human values."

"How can I love this great god Pan?" wrote Emerson at this time. In Thoreau he found Pan incarnated. To this "Bachelor of Nature," animals came as to Orpheus and St. Francis; in the woods he needed no watch and no calendar; to the "niftiness" of a Yankee whittler he united the eye of an Indian.

We have seen that Emerson had already discerned the value of facts to a philosopher and that he had begun to collect them; but in his "young friend" he found new eyes and hands. And how the boy could write! At its best his style had the meat and sap of groundnut and calamus, with the azure shimmer of mist over water.

Another of Emerson's young companions was William Ellery Channing, namesake and nephew of the great Unitarian divine. As true a lover of nature as Thoreau, he was a better poet, in the restricted sense of a maker of verse, and an adventurer, a rebel, and an "original." He left Harvard without a degree, denounced the "bottomless stupidity" of the Bostonians, married a sister of Margaret Fuller, played hermit in Illinois, botanized, collected old books, smoked, and lived in the "eternal moment" quite as fully as did Emerson and Thoreau. As a companion

on a walk he was even more exhilarating than Henry, for he possessed the impishness and high spirits of a faun. And yet he could be serious. One line in his poem, "The Poet's Hope," has kept his name alive:

> If my bark sinks, 'tis to another sea.

It was a favourite of Emerson's.

And there was Christopher Pearse Cranch, Virginian by birth, ordained Unitarian minister, but painter by profession, a musician and a ventriloquist, for three years an intimate of Emerson and Channing, but for the remainder of his life a dweller in Italy. He is best remembered by a single quatrain, which was on every transcendental tongue:

> Thought is deeper than all speech,
> Feeling deeper than all thought;
> Souls to souls can never teach
> What unto themselves was taught.

And there was Jones Very, son of a "cultivated sea-captain" of Salem, graduate of Harvard in 1836, for a while professor of Greek there, licensed to preach but never preaching, friend and biographer of James Freeman Clarke, and sonneteer. He was more of pietist and quietist than the others, and was by some considered "a little mad." He was the extreme mystic of all the group, and therefore found Emerson in the end disappointing.

It is significant that Emerson found his greatest pleasure in the society of young men, but it is even more significant that they were young men of an in-

tense individuality. They were friends, but not disciples.

II

One can hardly repeat too often that Emerson was "self-made," though in a quite different sense from that in which the term is ordinarily used. Essays almost innumerable have been written on the influences that shaped his beliefs, but although they are highly instructive they miss the fact that, as Mr. Paul Elmer More says, "the whole stamp of his mind was taken" before German or Oriental speculation was open to him. It often "coloured his language," but scarcely altered his views at all.

The theories of Kant, Schelling, and Fichte perhaps came to him first by way of Coleridge and Carlyle; later at first hand. About 1836, the "Eastern scriptures" began to attract the attention of Concord and Boston. Emerson and Thoreau selected passages from Confucius, "Chaldean oracles," Hindu meditations for publication in the *Dial,* and Emerson's Journals contain citations from the *Code* of Menu, the *Megha Duta* of Kalidasa, and so forth, the first I have noted being dated 1836.

This year and the few following may be taken as central in his life. They are the years of *Nature,* "The American Scholar," and the Divinity School Address, of the founding of the Transcendental Club, and of the first stirrings of communism, which eventuated in the experiments of Brook Farm (1840) and Fruitlands (1841). In 1840 appeared the first number of the *Dial;*

in 1841, Thoreau first formed the project, which he carried out in 1845, of living alone on Walden Pond. They were great times among the intellectuals, and they saw the emergence of Emerson from a local to a national figure.

The Transcendental Club was the natural drawing together of those men and women who had a common interest in German speculation, Neo-Platonism, and Oriental mysticism. They had met informally for many months before any regular meetings were arranged. It was on the 19th of September, 1836, that Emerson, Frederick Henry Hedge, Convers Francis, James Freeman Clarke, and Bronson Alcott met at George Ripley's house and "formed an organization to aid an exchange of thought among those interested in the 'new views' in philosophy, theology and literature." Before long the group was augmented, Theodore Parker, Margaret Fuller, Orestes A. Brownson, Elizabeth and Sophia Peabody, Thoreau, Hawthorne, Very, Cranch, Charles T. Follen, and Channing being at various times connected with the Club. It may be remarked in passing that every one of those mentioned was an interesting person. Emerson's rôle among them was a quiet one; he was a listener, rather than an active participator in discussion.

Out of the discussions of the Club came two practical experiments which have been the subject of a large literature of their own: the *Dial* and Brook Farm, but they concern us very little here. The *Dial,* a quarterly, for four years the official organ of the movement, was certainly the most distinguished

periodical in America in its day. From 1840 to 1842, Margaret Fuller was editor, with George Ripley as assistant editor; from 1842 to 1844 Emerson was editor, and then it was discontinued as a financial failure. It discussed German metaphysics, theological questions, foreign books, art, and music; it contained the famous "Orphic Sayings" of Alcott, translations from "oriental scriptures," the first essays of Thoreau, essays and reviews by Emerson, poems by Very, Cranch, Channing, Lowell, Emerson, criticism by Miss Fuller, and much heterogeneous material by new and otherwise unknown contributors. The ultimate failure of the quarterly is not so surprising as that it should have lived so long; for its subscription list never numbered more than three hundred, nothing was paid for contributions, and the literary and spiritual tone of the whole was pitched so high that it seems to have left the larger public either gasping or derisive. Parodies of its contents were a popular pastime, and its editors were freely denominated "zanies," "Bedlamites," and "madder than the Mormons." And even those who were interested in its success were not satisfied with it, because, of them, the reformers found no controversy or propaganda, the extreme idealists, no extreme idealism. As is so often the case in magazine publishing, the drudgery was faithfully performed by women, and that it ever reached the printer at all was largely due to the devotion of Miss Fuller and Miss Elizabeth Peabody.

To the *Dial,* Emerson contributed three lectures: "Man the Reformer," "The Young American," and

"The Transcendentalist"; three essays: "Gifts," "The Comic," and one of the two on "Art"; and a score of poems, including "Woodnotes," Part I, "The Snowstorm," and "The Problem"; besides a number of excellent reviews. That he was willing to assume the ardours and endurances of editorship shows that he believed in the venture. But he cannot be called a good editor, if by the term we mean one who satisfies a public. He cared nothing about a public. "I wish," he said of it, "to write pure mathematics, and not a culinary almanac or application of the arts and sciences"; which was his way of saying that he scorned timely articles and discussions. He opposed the publication of an article on temperance, but it "sold the whole issue in which it appeared." In his Journal, at the time of Miss Fuller's retirement, he confessed: "I wish it to live, but I do not wish to be its life. Neither do I like to put it in the hands of the Humanity and Reform men, because they trample on letters and poetry; nor in the hands of the scholars, for they are dead and dry." And later, in a letter: "Poor *Dial!*—it has not pleased any mortal." The fact was that he was really interested in nothing it contained except what he called its poetry.

During the same years he dreamed of a kind of Socratic grove or academe in which he and his friends should each announce his own subject and topics and hold say two lectures or conversations a week, with symposia in the evenings and new-light preaching Sunday—in short, an anticipation of the Concord School of Philosophy. But nothing came of it.

In September, 1842, Emerson and Hawthorne walked to Harvard, Massachusetts, and visited the Shakers. "They are in many ways an interesting society, but at present have an additional importance as an experiment of Socialism, which so falls in with the temper of the times." The interest in what he calls socialism, long since (from 1776) a definite religious movement in America, had been given a secular impetus by the visits of Robert Owen, from 1824 onward, and by the theories of Charles Fourier, introduced by his disciple, Albert Brisbane, author of the *Social Destiny of Man,* in 1840. A phalanx, or phalanstery, as Fourier called his settlements, was founded in New Jersey in 1843 and lasted until 1855. The first community of still another movement, the Icarian of Etienne Cabet, was established in Texas in 1848.

The most famous Fourierist phalanx in America was, of course, Brook Farm, started in 1841, with the purchase by a joint stock company of a farm at West Roxbury. It was not directly affected by Fourierist doctrines, however, until 1844. The Brook Farm Association for Industry and Education, as it was called, has gained its place in popular fame largely because of the prominence of the men and women concerned in it and because of Hawthorne's very free use of his experiences there in *The Blithedale Romance* (1852);[1] but it was only one of dozens of such ventures the world over.

Emerson's connection with the Farm was, as Holmes

[1]The standard book on Brook Farm is Lindsay Swift's *Brook Farm: Its Members, Scholars, and Visitors.* 1900.

said, "tangential." He wished to believe in it; he greatly admired George Ripley's courage in giving up the ministry to make the experiment; and yet "very slowly and, almost with penitence," he declined to join. "I wished," he confessed in his Journal, "to be convinced, to be thawed, to be made nobly mad by the kindlings before my eye of a new dawn of human piety." "I approve every wild action of the experimenters; I say what they say, and my only apology for not doing their work is preoccupation of mind. I have a work, of my own, which I know how to do with some success. It would leave that undone if I should undertake with them. . . . So I stay where I am, even with the degradation of owning bank-stock and seeing poor men suffer whilst the universal genius apprises me of this disgrace, and beckons me to the martyr's and redeemer's office. This debility of practice, this staying by our work, is belief too; for obedience to a man's genius is the particular of faith; by and by shall come the universal of faith."

This statement may stand as representative of his attitude toward reform in general. It is an attitude that will never satisfy ardent souls, who believe in organization, a programme, and "direct action." What he objected to in Brook Farm and, later, in Fruitlands, was not the communistic principle but the organization. "At the name of a society," he wrote in 1840, "all my repulsions play, all my quills rise and sharpen." He objected to the size and elaborateness of the experiments and to the preliminary investment of large sums of money. He was quite willing to practise the

principle at home, even proposing that the Alcotts should come and live with him. "Lidian and I have given him an invitation to establish his household with us for a year, and have explained to him and Mrs. Alcott our views or dreams respecting labour and plain living." Mrs. Emerson loyally acceded to the plan, but Mrs. Alcott sensibly declined. It is interesting to think what might have happened if Jo, Beth, Meg, and Amy had come to the Coolidge house. This was in 1840, and in the same year Emerson tried to "adopt the country practice of having only one table in the house." Again Lidian agreed, but this time the cook refused—"firmly refused." But these rebuffs did not wholly daunt him in his desire to do something besides preach equality. He now determined to test out another tenet of the communists, and to indulge strenuously in manual labour. Hitherto, he says in a letter, his day labour had been largely emblematic, like the Emperor of China's. But he now entered into an arrangement with Henry Thoreau to live in the house and to instruct him in garden and field work. He hoped to derive much physical benefit from the exercise, for he was still by no means robust. He soon discovered, however, that manual work interfered with his writing. "When the terrestrial corn, beets, onions, and tomatoes flourish, the celestial archetypes do not." The garden which he could cultivate was the garden of the mind. His last little flurry of reform enthusiasm was a fleeting experiment in vegetarianism.

His general attitude toward reform is expressed in a letter to an unknown correspondent of 1840: "The

first impulse of the newly stricken mind, stricken by the light from heaven, is to lament the death with which it is surrounded. As far as the horizon it can scarcely see anything else than tombs, and ghosts and a sort of dead-alive population. War, war without end, seems then to be its lot; how can it testify to the truth, to life, but by affirming in all places that death is here and death is there, and all which has a name to live is dead? Yet God has higher and better methods. Come out, he saith, from this death, once and forever. Not by hate of death, but by new and larger life is death to be vanquished. In thy heart is life. Obey that; it is inventive, creative, prodigal of life and beauty. Thence heroism, virtue, redemption, succour, opportunity, come to thee and all. . . . If thou wouldst have the sense of poverty, squalid poverty, bestir thyself in endless proclamation of war against the sins of society, thyself appearing to thyself the only exception. If thou wouldst inherit boundless joyful wealth, leave the war to such as like it."

This was a hard doctrine to those who were alive to civil and political wrongs and burned to redress them. But the difference between them and him was not so deep as it seemed. He held that when an evil was definitely perceived and capable of amendment, it should be attacked immediately and boldly; but he had little patience with short views. "The abolitionists should resist," he wrote, "because they are literalists; they know exactly what they object to, and there is a government which will content them." But he had no faith in that tendency—perhaps even more evident to-

day than then—of people to rush into reform or service of their fellows without asking themselves, first, whether the reform would not come without their aid, and, second, whether they had prepared themselves for the task they were undertaking. In opposing general abuses and defects of human nature his philosophy taught him to have faith in evolution and in power of example. To those who objected to the payment of state taxes—and they numbered several of his friends —he suggested that they would find no really logical solution of the problem except to die. To live in a civilized society and yet to quarrel with such fundamental institutions as the taxes and the vote seemed to him mere quixotism and pedantry.

He nevertheless always looked upon enthusiasm with benevolence because it was a symptom of the vitality of the age. "A good deal of character in our abused age. The rights of woman, the antislavery, temperance, peace, health, and money movements; female speakers, mobs and martyrs, the paradoxes, the antagonism of old and new, the uneasy relation of domestics, the struggling toward better household arrangements—all indicate life at the heart, not yet justly organized at the surface."

He found great pleasure in attending town meetings. He loved to sit among his neighbours and listen to plain men manage town affairs. He spoke but seldom and then with diffidence, but he greatly admired the strong good sense and native eloquence of others who, elsewhere undistinguished, here often showed the ability which he believed every man to pos-

sess. Here, he said, the roots of society were reached.

At various times he was a Curator of the local Lyceum, always attending the meetings when he was not out of town addressing similar bodies elsewhere. The Lyceum was new to New England, its purpose still being similar to that of the modern public forum. It was a kind of mutual improvement society, at the meetings of which debates between selected disputants were the usual form of entertainment; but these were superseded by lectures on historical, philanthropic, literary, or scientific subjects. As time went on, the administrators found great difficulty in keeping the proceedings free from political and religious agitation and, with the approach of the Civil War, the passions engendered by the subject of slavery all but wrecked the institution.

As early as 1837 Emerson was invited to address the Salem Lyceum, but in terms which he considered invidious. He declined with dignity though with emphasis. In Concord, according to his son, he was for a time, along with Theodore Parker and Wendell Phillips, considered "obnoxious to the Lyceum members," and yet he was tolerated there one, two, or three times nearly every winter for forty-five years.

Emerson's lectures, speeches, and public readings, as recorded by Mr. Cabot, in the Appendix to the *Life,* extend in date from 1832 to 1881 and in number from one to eighteen yearly. The total number I estimate at about two hundred and sixty. But the list represents but a small fraction of the sum of his public appearances, especially after 1850, when on his

Western tours he spoke nearly every night. On his important formal engagements he rarely repeated a lecture in title, arrangement, or manner, though he of course used the same materials over and over. In general his custom seems to have been to jot down headings and salient ideas in his Journal, work them over experimentally in his Lyceum lectures, develop and improve them still further in his appearances before more sophisticated audiences, and condense and polish them finally in the essays.

From 1840 onward his engagements took him farther and farther from home: to Dartmouth, Waterville College, Middlebury College; to New York (1843), Springfield, Illinois (1853), Philadelphia (1853), Washington (1862), Chicago (1867). After 1850 he made a tour to the West nearly every winter. Of his experiences I shall speak in a subsequent chapter.

His opposition to slavery was consistent from the beginning, although he deplored the bigotry and bitterness of many of the abolitionists and of their opponents and refused to join any organization. His courage when put to the test was unfailing, in spite of his temperamental dislike of embroilment in controversy. Indeed, in the crisis of the Fugitive Slave Law and of Webster's defection, he showed a definite heroism which those who have taxed him with a lack of interest in public questions seem to have forgotten.

When it was dangerous even to mention Lovejoy on a platform he went out of his way, in a lecture, to praise him as a martyr to the principle of free speech.

He delivered anti-slavery addresses in Concord in 1837 and 1844, and in 1845 was member of a committee at a meeting in Concord to protest against the treatment of Samuel Hoar in South Carolina. In 1846 he published a sorrowful but powerful letter concerning the deportation of a Negro from Boston to the South, and, after the passage of the Fugitive Slave Act, he experienced a depression of mind which "for a time darkened the face of day." In public speeches he described the Act as "a Law which every one will break on the earliest occasion"; and, when Daniel Webster supported it, he attacked him with a vigour such as he never showed again in a public utterance, in spite of "constant interruptions of hisses and groans." When the Civil War finally came, he had convinced himself not only of its inevitability but of its necessity. Perhaps the most impressive testimony to Emerson's influence in the years preceding the War is Lowell's, who declared that more than anyone else he heartened the young men to make the great sacrifice.

Mr. John Jay Chapman, in his essay on Emerson, after quoting passages from the earlier Journals to show that at first the excesses and extravagances of the abolitionists offended Emerson's sense of decency and order, continues with the following, which he pronounces "the most interesting page of Emerson's published Journal": "I had occasion to say to Elizabeth Hoar that I like best the strong and worthy persons, like her father, who support the social order without hesitation or misgiving. I like these; they never incommode us by exciting grief, pity, or perturbation of any

sort. But the professed philanthropists, it is strange and horrible to say, are an altogether odious set of people, whom one would shun as the worst of bores and canters. But my conscience, my unhappy conscience respects that hapless class who see the faults and strains of our social order, and who pray and strive incessantly to right the wrong; this annoying class of men and women, though they commonly find the work altogether beyond their faculty, and their results are, for the present, distressing. They are partial, and apt to magnify their own. Yes, and the prostrate penitent, also—he is not comprehensive, he is not philosophical in those tears and groans. Yet I feel that under him and his partiality and exclusiveness is the earth and the sea and all that in them is, and the axis around which the universe revolves passes through his body where he stands."

The point was that when Emerson had once convinced himself that, whatever their unloveliness, the agitators were moved by the great currents or trade winds of Eternity, he was not only willing to tolerate them but to work for them. And this, as we shall see, he did.

III

Meanwhile, he never declined to serve the town if his time permitted. His first civic honour was conferred in 1838, when he was elected one of the hogreeves, his duty being, apparently, to restrain pigs that had wandered into mischief. But he was also chosen a member of the School Committee and of the Library

Committee, and served for many years. He was considered, moreover, the proper representative of the town at all civic celebrations. In 1835 he spoke of the devoted men who had been its founders, and two years later composed and recited the noble Concord Hymn. In 1867 he delivered an address on the local Revolutionary heroes, and shortly before his death spoke briefly at the dedication of the Minute Man monument.

Into the social life of the town he entered with his usual quiet geniality. His greatest pleasure was in the Social Circle. "Much the best society I have ever known is a club in Concord called the Social Circle, consisting always of twenty-five of our citizens, doctor, lawyer, farmer, trader, miller, mechanic, etc., solidest of men, who yield the solidest of gossip. Harvard University is a wafer compared to the solid land which my friends represent. I do not like to be absent from home on Tuesday evening in winter." Among his best friends were certain farmers of the vicinity, who won his respect by their homely idealism, his amusement by their shrewdness, and his delight by their language; and he treasured a speaking acquaintance with many more humble characters. He especially enjoyed talking with men who had to do with horses: stagecoach drivers, teamsters, and stablemen.

"Concord," he wrote in 1834, "is a little town, and yet has its honours. We get a handful of every ton that comes to the city"; and he jotted down a list of the notable men and women who had lived there or had visited, not forgetting his customary touch of humour

in the addition, "Here too came Herr Driesbach with his cats and snakes." The annual visit of the Penobscot Indians always excited his interest, and he was gratified when gipsies and other wayfarers camped on his land.

Among his hobbies was fruit growing. He had read in the standard work of Downing of the theory of Van Mons concerning the amelioration of fruits by artificial selection, and drew from it illustrations of his favourite ideas of relativity and compensation. His earlier experiments in cultivation were not very successful, though he never failed to send specimens of apples and pears to the "Cattle-show" Exhibition. To a critic who said, "Your pears cost more than mine which I buy," he replied, "Yes, they are costly, but we all have expensive vices. You play at billiards, I at pear trees." His orchard became in time a source of income, but he was never able to look upon the produce as mere fruit. "The Newtown Pippins," he once said in an address at a cattle show; "are they not the Newton Pippins? or is it not this very pippin that demonstrated to Sir Isaac Newton the fall of the world—not the fall of Adam—but of the moon to the earth and of universal gravity? Well, here they are, a barrel of them; every one good to show gravitation and good to eat; every one as sound as the moon. What will you give for a barrel of moons?"

The Transcendental group were always obscurely troubled by "the world-old conflict between art and morality," and even Emerson, with all his instinctive

love of beauty, seems not to have known exactly what to do with the dancing of Fanny Elssler or a portfolio of pictures. Although in "The Rhodora" he wrote a line that has been incessantly quoted by those who take an unmoral view of art—"Beauty is its own excuse for being"—he certainly did not mean exactly what he is assumed to have meant. The last line of the same poem—"The selfsame Power that brought me here brought you"—is, if not a moral idea, certainly a religious one. The fact is that perhaps the deepest conviction of his life was that "things are saturated with the moral law. There is no escape from it. Violets and grass preach it; rain and snow, wind and tides, every change, every cause in Nature is nothing but a disguised missionary." But if violets and grass, rain and snow, then of course Fanny Elssler's dancing, the pictures of Guercino and Piranesi, the opera, and all forms of music. And yet, when he is confronted with a work of art, greatly admired by others, he is rather pathetically puzzled. "I pleased myself in seeing the pictures brought in her portfolio by Margaret Fuller: Guercino, Piranesi, Leyden, etc. It takes me long to know what to think of them, but I find out at last. I am quite confident in my criticism upon that infernal architecture of Piranesi, and very delicious it is to me to judge them when at last I begin to see. The difficulty consists in righting one's self before them; in arriving at a quite simple conviction that the sketch appeals to me, and coming to a state of equilibrium, leaving all allowance to spontaneous criticisms. Fear to judge, or haste to judge, alike vitiate the insight.

Many good pictures, as much knowledge of the artist and his times as can be; and perfect equilibrium of mind;—are the conditions of right judgment."

He knew practically nothing about the history, theory, or technique of any art; there is, indeed, a lack of the historic sense in all that he wrote. Under the influence of Margaret Fuller, who discussed art with acumen in the *Dial,* he seems to have had some perception of his deficiency. That he honestly loved pictures, music, architecture, there can be no doubt, but his love was untutored, ingenuous, and instinctive. Everyone has remarked his habit of naming strings of names—"Phidias, Raphael, Salvator Rosa"—"in such a way," as Mr. Chapman says, "that it is impossible to connect what he says with any impressions we have ever received from the works of those masters." And some have accused him of bluffing, after the manner of Poe. But he also names strings of authors, with whom he was intimately familiar—whom he had, in fact, read over and over, year by year. He was not bluffing. The lists meant something to him, but not an æsthetic something. Indeed, one doubts whether, when he mentions painters, he is thinking of their pictures at all. He is thinking of them as men who happened to be artists and who, by producing work which has won the suffrage of the world, aroused his respect for their moral greatness. One may smile to find Phidias and Salvator Rosa mentioned in the same breath, but must not conclude that he had never looked at the works of either. We may legitimately conclude that he had looked at them with the naïve gaze of a child.

It is refreshing, nevertheless, to discover a man so free from dilettantism and jargon. His Journals suggest that he believed that any work of art will reveal itself in time to anyone who sits down often enough before it with a mind in equilibrium and without fear or haste; and that is probably true. The resulting appreciation will certainly, in the long run, be a finer and sounder one than that which follows the too common approach of a mind, full of historical and technical data, that takes no account of the human or—if one must—moral qualities of the work or the worker.

I do not know that the point has been made that in Emerson's time the historical and technical, or æsthetic, appreciation of art had hardly come into existence. Here and there it is referred to in the notes or lectures of an artist, perhaps, as in the *Diary* of Benjamin Robert Haydon; but so far as the general public was concerned, it was one of the typical movements of the Victorian Era. Here is an example of the kind of interpretation that has filled libraries of books since 1825, when it was written, but for which one may look almost in vain before that date. It refers to Tintoretto's St. George and the Egyptian Princess:

> The robe of Sabra, warmly glazed with Prussian blue, is relieved from the pale greenish background by a vermilion scarf; and the full hues of both are beautifully echoed, as it were, in a lower key by the purple-lake coloured stuffs and bluish armour of the saint, besides an ample balance to the vivid azure drapery on the foreground in the indigo shades of the wild wood surrounding the castle.

This was written by Thomas Griffiths Wainewright, the poisoner, of whom Oscar Wilde speaks as "one

of the first to develop what has been called the art-literature of the Nineteenth Century, that form of literature which has found in Mr. Ruskin and Mr. Browning its two most perfect exponents." No doubt it was competent criticism of its kind, but it would not have interested Emerson in the least. The qualities such criticism seeks in a picture are "composition, beauty and dignity of line, richness of colour, and imaginative power." What Emerson sought was some evidence of the greatness of God. He had glimmerings that a picture might be enjoyed, merely for its own sake, as a beautiful composition in line, mass, and colour, without implicating the Infinite and Eternal; but he thought that such enjoyment was trivial. If he had not thought so, he would have made a greater effort to experience it. His idea of seeing "many good pictures" and of acquiring "as much knowledge of the artist and his times as can be," ended, on the whole, with intention.

As for music, he "had not a musical ear" and could not recognize the most familiar airs. And yet he loved it and occasionally went to hear the best. "I sometimes think, could I only have music on my own terms, could I live in the city and know where I could go whenever I wished the ablution and inundation of musical waves, that were a bath and a medicine." Of a certain concert he notes: "When I heard them in Boston, I had some dreams about music; last night—nothing. Last night I enjoyed the audience." He was particularly fond of simple untrained singing which was devoid of egotism and affectation. "I delight . . . to hear that poor slip

of a girl, without education, without thought, yet show this fine instinct in her singing, so that every note of her song sounds to me like an adventure and a victory in the *'ton-welt.'* " "I always wait for those sweet modulations, so pure of all manner of personality, so universal that they open the ear like the rising of the wind."

Before 1850 he went regularly to church, but after that time went less and less often. He always admired good preaching and still more a courageous preacher. As he says in the poem, "The Problem":

> "I like a church; I like a cowl;
> I love a prophet of the soul;
> And on my heart monastic aisles
> Fall like sweet strains, or pensive smiles;"

and yet he prefers to worship God in nature:

> "The word unto the prophet spoken
> Was writ on tables yet unbroken;
> The word by seers or sibyls told,
> In groves of oak, or fanes of gold,
> Still floats upon the morning wind,
> Still whispers to the willing mind."

In his habits he was always mildly ascetic, though his inclinations were as far from mortification of the flesh on the one hand as from self-indulgence on the other. His stoicism was the fruit of a natural love of simplicity and plainness. He liked to build his own fires, fetch in his own wood, carry his own bags and bundles, catch his own horse, drive his own carriage. "The

king's servant is the king himself" and "My own right hand my cupbearer shall be," were favourite mottoes, as was Napoleon's "Respect the burden," used of servants and labourers. In his eating he was always temperate and sometimes, by way of experiment, stoical; but he always objected to dietary fads as putting too much stress on that which should be subordinated to higher aims. His attitude toward wine was liberal. He seldom drank it, but gave as his reason for moderation that wine disagreed with him. He notes that "A. bears wine better than B. bears water." After his fiftieth year he occasionally smoked in company and part of a cigar when alone. "The scatter-brain Tobacco," he wrote in 1866; "yet a man of no conversation should smoke." He once dallied with the fad of cold bathing, but soon relinquished the habit as not for him. "I believe that the composition of water must be one part Hydrogen and three parts Conceit. . . . Oh, if an enemy had done this!" His favourite exercise was walking, but he was a good swimmer and skater. In dress he was neat and inconspicuous, wearing black in the city and gray in the country. For pet animals he cared nothing, appearing to be a little afraid of them, and he regretted his lack of skill in managing the domestic animals of the farm.

Of his appearance his son writes:

> Mr. Emerson was tall—six feet in his shoes—erect until his latter days, neither very thin nor stout in frame, with rather narrow and unusually sloping shoulders, and long neck, but very well poised head, and a dignity of carriage. His eyes were very blue, his hair dark brown, his complexion clear and always with good

colour. His features were pronounced, but refined, and his face very much modelled, as a sculptor would say.

Mrs. Emerson was a woman of warm religious fervour and of a temperament "sober, steadfast, and demure." Her friends called her the Abbess and her husband called her Asia, in playful deference to both her spiritual appearance and her dignity of manner. But she was by no means strait-laced, loyally seconded her husband's experiments in living, however inconvenient they might be, and is accredited with genuine wit. She remarked that the giving of an unaccustomed order in the kitchen made her feel like a boy who throws a stone and then runs. It was she who announced that "on Sundays it seems wicked to go to church," and she once permitted the children to play battledore and shuttlecock on a rainy Sunday afternoon. It was her husband who objected.

Emerson's first child, Waldo, was born in 1836; his second, Ellen in 1839; his third, Edith, in 1841; and his fourth, Edward Waldo, in 1844. His joy in the birth of his first child was unbounded, though the Journal entries concerning him show an amusing mixture of bewilderment and delight. For five years the little boy was his constant companion and brother philosopher, and he lovingly records proofs of the child's growing intelligence, his sensitive spirit, his innocent observations. In 1842 Waldo died of scarlet fever.

The father's sorrow found its first expression in heartbroken notes in the Journal. There can be no doubt that the boy had touched many hearts and that Emerson's praise was by no means merely a father's

partiality. The single daguerreotype existing shows him to have been a good-looking, manly child, with a fine head and very thoughtful eyes. "The deep-eyed child," Emerson calls him; "a boy of early wisdom"; and he writes to Carlyle: "A promise like that Boy's I shall never see." One can hardly bear to read the notes and letters concerning his death. "You can never sympathize with me," he writes to Carlyle, "you can never know how much of me such a young child can take away. A few weeks ago I accounted myself a rich man, and now the poorest of all." His grief found at last an expression in the tender but disconsolate Threnody.[1]

[1]For many of the details in this chapter I am indebted necessarily to *Emerson in Concord: A Memoir, Written for the Social Circle in Concord,* by Edward Waldo Emerson, 1888.

CHAPTER SEVEN

"THE MIDDLE OF THE MOUNT"

THE preceding chapter was concerned chiefly with Emerson's daily life and personal characteristics: the present will deal with his literary activities during the same period. But first it will be well, taking 1841 as the middle year of his life, to indulge in a brief retrospect in order to discover what had been his accomplishment. By this year he had published *Nature* and the first series of the *Essays;* had delivered the great address on the American Scholar, the Divinity School Address, and the lectures, afterward published: "Literary Ethics," "Method of Nature," "Man the Reformer," "On the Times," and "The Conservative"; besides contributing to the *Dial* many essays and reviews. Of his poems in addition to the early lyrics already mentioned, he had written "Each and All," "The Apology," "Concord Hymn," "The Humble-Bee," "Uriel," "The Problem," "Wood-Notes," "The Sphinx," "The Snow-Storm," and "Saadi," to name only those which are most admired. His fame as a lecturer was spreading beyond New England, though as a speaker he had not as yet travelled beyond Hanover, New Hampshire. Most of his series of lectures had been delivered at the Masonic Temple, Boston, before the Society for Diffusion of Useful Knowledge.

Such series were: "Tests of Great Men," "Human Culture," "Human Life," and "The Present Age." Altogether, in quantity, the accomplishment seems meagre compared with that which was to follow; and yet it is hardly an exaggeration to say that practically every one of his controlling and characteristic ideas had already been promulgated, either in public or in the pages of his private Journal.

I have thought it best to deal later with his poetry as a whole. It is sufficient to note here that before 1841 he had written much of the best.

The famous oration on the American Scholar was delivered before the Phi Beta Kappa Society, at Cambridge, August 31, 1837. A month earlier he had written in his Journal: "If the All-Wise would give me light, I should write for the Cambridge men a theory of the Scholar's office. It is not all books which it behooves him to know, least of all to be a book-worshipper, but he must be able to read in all books that which alone gives value to books—in all to read one, the one incorruptible text of Truth. That alone of their style is intelligible, acceptable to him." This is the germ of what Holmes calls "our intellectual Declaration of Independence."

The oration crystallized the elements of the New England renascence—"the Newness," as it was called—as did no other single work of the time. Bryant had anticipated Emerson's pleas for intellectual independence, but with much less scope and vigour. Lowell says:

> The Puritan revolt had made us ecclesiastically, and the Revolution politically independent, but we were still socially and intel-

lectually moored to English thought, till Emerson cut the cable. . . . His oration before the Phi Beta Kappa Society . . . was an event without any former parallel in our literary annals, a scene to be always treasured in the memory for its picturesqueness and its inspiration. What crowded and breathless aisles, what windows clustering with eager heads, what enthusiasm of approval, what grim silence of foregone dissent!

And Holmes testifies that while some of the grave professors and sedate clergymen were startled, the

young men went out from it as if a prophet has been proclaiming to them, "Thus saith the Lord." No listener ever forgot that address, and among all the noble utterances of the speaker it may be questioned if one ever contained more truth in language more like that of immediate inspiration.

It is unnecessary to attempt an extended synopsis of the speech. Superficially it was, as Mr. Cabot says, "a much needed monition to the cultivated classes of persons in New England to think for themselves instead of taking their opinions from Europe or from books"; but at bottom it was a plea for self-reliance in all things. After tracing the three great sources of education—nature, books, and action—Emerson proceeds to examine the scholar's duties. "They are such as become Man Thinking. They may all be comprised in self-trust. The office of the scholar is to cheer, to raise, and to guide men by showing them facts amid appearances." This being his function, "it becomes him to feel all confidence in himself, and to defer never to the popular cry. . . . In silence, in steadiness, in severe abstraction, let him hold by himself. . . . In self-trust all the virtues are comprehended. Free should the scholar be—free and brave."

Very early in the Address one perceives that Emerson cares very little about the scholar simply as such, but is concerned with Man—that is, any man—Thinking. The vision of the scholar as Man Studying or Man "Researching" swims into his ken only to be brushed aside. A scholar of books alone is only a third of a man.

He is pleading for and with all men. "I believe man has been wronged; he has wronged himself. Men are become of no account." And the reason is that we have forgotten our destiny, which is divine. "The private life of one man shall be a more illustrious monarchy . . . than any kingdom in history. For a man, rightly viewed, comprehendeth the particular natures of all men. . . . It is one soul which animates all men."

This idea, which he owed, perhaps, vaguely to Origen (*"Universus mundus velut animal quoddam immensum"*), though it is a commonplace of mysticism, is persistent in his thought, not only here but throughout his life. He gave it, however, his own turn and use. Prosaically it may be stated as follows: Every man has in himself something of the divine, is himself a part of the World-Soul, and therefore has within himself, and himself is, the measure of all things. As a corollary, since nature is another manifestation of the World-Soul, the divine in man and in nature produces an inevitable mutual attraction. In a quite definite sense, the "American Scholar" is a practical application of the principles enunciated in *Nature* and in the poems, "The Sphinx" and "The World-Soul."

In the recent poetry, in elementary education, in

science, he finds hopeful signs that man is outgrowing his traditional notions of the important and unimportant and is discovering that to the soul there is no great and small, no high and low. "I embrace the common, I explore it and sit at the feet of the familiar, the low. Give me insight into to-day, and you may have the antique and future worlds." In "The Sphinx" he declares that

"The fiend that man harries
Is love of the Best;"

and here he says that "there is no trifle, there is no puzzle, but one design unites and animates the farthest pinnacle and the lowest trench." His exhortation is to turn our eyes from both past and future and to look around us, for both past and future are *here*. "Show me the sublime purpose lurking, as it always does lurk, in the suburbs and extremities of nature." Forget what men have said about man, nature, art, God, and use your own eyes, stand on your own feet.

In "Self-Reliance" he was soon to say: "Let a man then know his worth, and keep things under his feet. Let him not peep or steal, or skulk up and down with the air of a charity-boy, a bastard, or an interloper in the world which exists for him. . . . Man is timid and apologetic; he is no longer upright; he dares not say, 'I think,' 'I am,' but quotes some saint or sage. He is ashamed before the blade of grass or the blowing rose." And here also, among the cultured and intellectual, he finds indolence, decency, and complacency. "The spirit of the American freeman is already sus-

pected to be timid, imitative, tame. Public and private avarice make the air we breathe thick and fat. . . . See already the tragic consequence. The mind of this country, taught to aim at low objects, eats upon itself. There is no work for any but the decorous and the complaisant. Young men of the fairest promise . . . inflated by the mountain winds, shined upon by all the stars of God, find the earth below not in unison with these, but are hindered from action by the disgust which the principles on which business is conducted inspire, and turn drudges, or die of disgust, some of them suicides. What is the remedy? They did not yet see, and thousands of young men as hopeful now crowding to the barriers for the career do not yet see, that *if the single man plant himself indomitably on his instincts, and there abide, the huge world will come round to him.*"

I have italicized the last clause because it puts as memorably as any sentence he ever wrote the guiding principle of his life.

Reading the speech, one murmurs, "Ghosts, ghosts." For with some differences of emphasis it is quite as applicable to the life of to-day as it was when it was written.

About a year later he delivered before the senior class of the Divinity School at Cambridge an address which caused a much greater superficial disturbance. He was invited to speak by a committee of the students and, although he knew full well that what he should say would shock many of their elders, he decided faithfully to deliver his message and "let it work ac-

cording to its truth." The immediate effect of his message was that he was freely denominated "infidel," "pantheist," and "atheist," and became an object of suspicion among the orthodox for thirty years to come. He might have been forgiven his criticism of the preaching of his time, and even of the history of the church, but he could not be forgiven his serenely thorough handling of Unitarian dogma. His principle of self-reliance excluded even the historic Jesus as an object of imitation. "Historic Christianity," he says, "has dwelt, it dwells, with noxious exaggeration about the *person* of Jesus." But "the soul knows no persons. It invites every man to expand to the full circle of the universe, and will have no preferences but those of spontaneous love. But by this Eastern monarchy of a Christianity, which indolence and fear have built, the friend of man is made the injurer of man. The manner in which his name is surrounded with expressions which were once sallies of admiration and love, but are now petrified into official titles, kills all generous sympathy and liking. . . . Accept the injurious impositions of our early catechetical instruction, and even honesty and self-denial were but splendid sins, if they did not wear the Christian name. One would rather be

A pagan, suckled in a creed outworn,

than to be defrauded of his manly right in coming into nature and finding not names and places, not land and professions, but even virtue and truth foreclosed and monopolized. You shall not be a man even. You shall not own the world; you shall not dare and live after

the infinite Law that is in you, and in company with the infinite Beauty which heaven and earth reflect to you in all lovely forms; but you must subordinate your nature to Christ's nature; you must accept our interpretations, and take his portrait as the vulgar draw it."

These were brave words in 1838, and yet they were, in Emerson's view, only a natural step in his argument, the upshot of which was precisely the counsel which a year earlier he had given the scholars. "Let me admonish you, first of all, to go alone; to refuse the good models, even those which are sacred in the imagination of men, and dare to love God without mediator or veil. Friends enough you shall find who will hold up to your emulation Wesleys and Oberlins, Saints and Prophets. Thank God for these good men, but say, 'I also am a man!' Imitation cannot go above its models. The imitator dooms himself to hopeless mediocrity. . . . Cast behind you all conformity, and acquaint men at first hand with Deity."

We do not know what the young men thought of the address.

The other public speeches of the period we cannot notice, though no reader of Emerson should neglect the one on the Conservative. Never have the respective arguments for conservatism and radicalism been arrayed with a finer balance and acumen; never have the shortcomings of both been aired with a blander reasonableness. All of the earlier addresses are full of quiet gusto and all contain much that is quotable. But in 1841 appeared the volume upon which, more than any other, his fame rests.

Essays was published almost simultaneously in America and in England, the English edition containing a preface by Carlyle. The essays are twelve in number. Five form a group, which may perhaps best be read in this order: "History," "Self-Reliance," "Compensation," "Spiritual Laws," and "The Over-Soul," and which furnish a complete view of the basic principles of Emerson's "credo." The other seven apply to general topics or to special sections of experience some or all of the principles of the Emersonian philosophy. Two of the essays, "Self-Reliance" and "Compensation," are of course the best known of his works. Since they contain the explicit exposition of principles which may be called his favourites, I shall devote to them particular attention.

"Self-Reliance" is in part a mosaic of various utterances in public between 1836 and 1839 and, as we have seen, its main ideas had been growing in his mind and his Journal ever since his junior year in college. That it is a great essay the world has long since agreed. Its counsels, so homely, so penetrating, have become a part of our intellectual heritage. It has been the inspiration of many great men. It is a mighty leaven, but that it has yet leavened the lump of the general mind of American there is little evidence. Indeed, it would have saddened Emerson to know that to-day his country is even further from the intellectual and spiritual independence that he hoped for than in his own day. We have broken with Old World influences and with ecclesiastical domination, perhaps, but have taken new masters—bigotry, intolerance, fashion,

propaganda. Possibly, however, it is only our want of perspective that makes us feel discouraged.

At any rate the old battle cry is in these pages to-day, as clear and stirring as ever. "Trust thyself: every heart vibrates to that iron string." "Whoso would be a man, must be a nonconformist." "No law can be sacred to me but that of my own nature." "I shun father and mother and wife and brother when my genius calls me." "A foolish consistency is the hobgoblin of little minds." "An institution is the lengthened shadow of one man." The sentences shoot from the page like bullets. As reading for the right kind of youth, who will not take them too literally or too absolutely, they are as fine a tonic as one could wish.

The principle of self-reliance appears to have come to Emerson as a boy with the force of a positive inspiration. As a stimulus and a guide it was basic in his life. It is saved on the one hand from mere selfish egotism by its spiritual foundation. It is saved on the other hand from mere rhapsody by its human and social applications. It is really an article of faith. It is an old religious idea brought up to date.

"To each man according to his lights," said the old liberal theologian. Be true to the highest you know, says Emerson. That there may be difficulty in knowing whether what one knows is light and not darkness, he recognized, as he proves in the amusing anecdote of his boyhood. "I remember an answer which when quite young I was prompted to make to a valued adviser who was wont to importune me with the dear old doctrines of the church. On my saying, 'What have I

to do with the sacredness of traditions, if I live wholly from within?' my friend suggested—'But these impulses may be from below, not from above.' I replied, 'They do not seem to me to be such; but if I am the Devil's child, I will live them from the Devil.' " "No law," he adds, "can be sacred to me but that of my own nature. Good and bad are but names very readily transferable to that or this; the only right is what is after my constitution; the only wrong what is against it."

"How absolute the knave is!" many a reader has doubtless exclaimed, after reading such sentences as these last. And yet how familiar they sound to-day. For, it is odd to reflect, such reliance upon instinct is exactly what the modern naturalistic philosophy, at least as it appears in literature, has taught. The difference is, however, at the very roots. Emerson assumed God in all things; modern "naturalism" has assumed nature in all things, and a nature that is a bio-physico-chemical concept—"chemisms," as Mr. Dreiser loves to call them—in which God or spirit are ignored. Following "instinct" meant with Emerson perhaps all it means to-day, but it assumed that instinct is at last from God and not at last from the animals.

Here, as everywhere, he makes no allowance for what is called the weakness of human nature. To those who are keenly aware of this weakness, as it shows itself in sensuality, avarice, and "ever-anxious care," he is always exasperating, as he is to those who cannot forget that in an imperfect society they are forced to be in some sort their brothers' keepers. To such dis-

sentients he has one consistent reply: Have faith, and take long views. "'Remember,'" he writes in his Journal in 1841, "'to be sober and *to be disposed to believe;* for these are the nerves of wisdom.' The reformer" (in his terminology "reformer" means "idealist") "affirms the tendency, the law. Vulgar people show much acuteness in stating exceptions. He is careful not to answer them or to show that they are only exceptions. Enough for him that he has an advocate in their consciences also declaring the law." And in the same month: "How noble in secret are the men who have never stooped or betrayed their faith. The two or three rusty, perchance wearisome, souls, who could never bring themselves to the smallest composition with society, rise with grandeur in the background like statues of the gods. . . . If these had stooped a little, then we had had no examples, our ideas had been all unexecuted: we had been alone with the mind." In the poem, "The Celestial Love," he declares:

> "He that feeds men serveth few;
> He serves all who dares be true;"

and, in the Journal, once more: The idealist's defects "are the strength of the man of the world," and he would have said that the converse is equally true.

He was perhaps the most consistent radical that ever lived. He was all for a "neutral, godlike independence," an "unaffected, unbiased, unbribable, unaffrighted innocence." If he ignored the weakness of human nature, it was because he did not believe that human nature need be weak. If he ignored disease,

sin, crime, misfortune, it was because in his eyes these are all negations, and it is not salutary to dwell upon negations. He had dug down to the roots and found them sound and, tracing the tree upward, he was certain that all would be right if the tendency was right.

Of course, in an essay like "Self-Reliance," he is concerned primarily with principles, and he had learned that the secret of effectiveness in writing consists in unqualified statement. He is "making a point." "I would have my book read," he once wrote, "as I have read my favourite books, not with explosion and astonishment, a marvel and a rocket, but a friendly and agreeable influence stealing like the scent of a flower or the sight of a new landscape on a traveller. I neither wish to be hated and defied by such as I startle, nor to be kissed and hugged by the young whose thoughts I stimulate." This is all very well, as a general proposition; but in this essay he is handling what to many a young reader is dynamite, and he knows it. He is as nearly excited as he ever was. His eyes seem to flash, his breast to heave, his voice to swell, as he marches on, eyes front, toward the horizon. People who querulously complain that he takes too much for granted, that his message is too high, too uncompromising, and that ordinary man cannot attain unto it, have good grounds for their view. But to try to measure him by any gauge of expediency is like trying to measure "Andes, Alp, or Himmeleh" with a two-foot rule.

But his self-reliance is no cocky and bumptious self-conceit. No one dare try to practise it without due preparation. It is the flower of a long and arduous dis-

cipline. "What makes the majesty of the heroes of the senate and the field, which so fills the imagination? The consciousness of a train of great days and victories behind. . . . Honour is venerable to us because it is no ephemeris. It is always ancient virtue." The only safe basis of self-trust, then, is character. "It teaches above our wills." "If I can be great enough now to do right and scorn eyes, I must have done so much right before as to defend me now." Hence emerges, as always, in his thinking, the importance of the present moment. "The force of character is always cumulative"; therefore, "be it how it will, do right *now.*"

The trouble is, as many will plead, that we are quite willing to do right now if we can be sure that it is right. He anticipates the objection. We have a special faculty, a trustee, as he calls it, which is the "essence of genius, of virtue, and of life," and which serves us as both our guide and our stay. We call it "Spontaneity or Instinct" or Intuition. It is the first wisdom, something that we knew before we knew knowledge. His phraseology as well as his thought recall those of "Tintern Abbey" and the "Intimations" ode, both of which were favourite poems at this time. "We denote this primary wisdom as Intuition, whilst all later teachings are tuitions. In that deep force, the last fact behind which analysis cannot go, all things find their final origin. For the sense of being which in calm hour rises, we know not how, in the soul, is not diverse from things, from space, from light, from time, from man, but one with them and proceeds obviously from the same source whence their life and being also proceed.

We first share the life by which things exist and afterwards see them as appearances in nature and forget that we have shared their cause. . . . We lie in the lap of immense intelligence, which makes us organs of its activity and receivers of its truth. When we discern justice, when we discern truth, we do nothing of ourselves, but allow a passage of its beams. If we ask whence this comes, if we seek to pry into the soul that causes—all metaphysics, all philosophy is at fault. Its presence or its absence is all we can affirm. Every man discerns between the voluntary acts of his mind and his involuntary perceptions. And to his involuntary perceptions he knows a perfect respect is due."

The doctrine of Instinct is, then, Platonism, as is the doctrine of Wordsworth's great strophe, "Our birth is but a sleep and a forgetting," though Emerson develops it more robustly. We come into this world as spirits "from God, who is our home," and our intuitions are glimpses of truth which we once saw in its full effulgence. Ordinary or practical knowledge is of this world, but spiritual knowledge or Truth is of the other. Intuition is the special faculty or organ by means of which we establish communication with the divine. It is the endowment of the Reason, as distinguished from the Understanding.

To rely unquestioningly upon intuition requires courage, if only because most persons deny either its existence or its validity, or at least have never proved to their own satisfaction the one or the other; and yet unless one believes in it, it cannot, of course, work in us and can avail us nothing. In the end, there-

fore, self-reliance is really a reliance upon the Self, the spirit, the God, and a regimen that in its human applications seems so practical, so homely, becomes in theory as mystical as justification by faith.

The next essay, "Compensation," illustrates as well as any Emerson's habit—or hobby—of finding in a vast collection of comparisons and analogies an underlying tendency which comes in time to appear a law. "Spiritual Laws" develops the principle in various applications, but "compensation," along with "self-reliance," seems to have been the earliest of these spiritual currents or gravitations to attract his attention. For some twenty years it remained a beloved speculation. Its popular appeal has no doubt been due largely to the sanction which, if accepted, it seems to give to optimism.

It is easy to see how the idea of a spiritual and moral compensation occurred to him. He saw physical and natural compensations all round him, biological, astronomical, chemical, mechanical, hydraulic, and saw no reason why so general a principle might not hold in the world of spirit. His method is not unlike that of the *Analogy of Religion*. As far as I know, no examination has been made of Emerson's possible debt to Butler. He had read the *Analogy* long since, and must have been struck, not only by the ingenuity of Butler's reasoning, but by the fact that the tendency of that reasoning is even more strongly ethical than religious. Argument by analogy has, however, always proved a precarious method. One cannot escape the suspicion that in postulating the law of compensation

the wish was for Emerson father to the thought: but perhaps that is so, unconsciously, in most philosophical speculation. Critics have pointed out that the doctrine of compensation, as he expounds it, rests upon various confusions of thinking and even of definition, but its drift is easily traced.

The point of departure is the idea of polarity, of which I have spoken in the Introduction. Everything has two sides, a positive and a negative, a good and an evil—everything, that is, except the soul. That is not a composition, but life, being, the "last affirmative." Vice is a negative of life or spirit (nature), and the man who persists in it "deceases from nature." But there is no penalty to virtue, because the virtuous man properly *is*—by his actions moves from the negative to the positive pole.

In spirit all men are one, and it is *love* that makes us perceive that they are. For love knows no More and Less, no His and Mine, but reduces all inequalities, as the sun melts icebergs in the sea. Intuitively, at first, we perceive this truth, and in time rationally. Calamity and change are at last seen to be only a part of the law of growth. The compensation of calamity is that it affords the means of a richer, higher, more helpful life.

To Oliver Wendell Holmes, this doctrine is so stern, so Hebraic, that it "might be preached in a synagogue, and the Rabbi would be praised for his performance." To John Morley, "Compensation" is a "fair-weather abstraction," in which Emerson is willfully blind to "that horrid burden and impediment of the soul, which

the churches call Sin, and which, by whatever name we call it, is a very real catastrophe in the moral nature of man." One suspects that Morley had not read the essay very recently, and that he remembered it, as most of us do, as a kind of blue haze of optimism. Read closely, it sheds little balm upon "fair-weather" people, for, while it sets bounds to evil and sorrow, it also incites to heroism. The ethics is not soft.

The trouble with all analyses of the essays is that they leave out nearly everything that makes us read them. As one critic says,

> The "Compensation" will long be read for its human interest, its eye for the homely concerns of practical life as well as for the welfare of the immanent soul, its freshness, and its thrilling call to duty—blown haughtily clear as the trumpets of *Lohengrin;*

and as another:

> "Compensation" is a brisk, nimble, companionable essay, attractive even to those with whom "The Over-Soul" is responsible for headaches. . . . He watches with inward gusto the good, housewifely universe making her shrewd bargains with her greedy customers, and with a fatal certainty getting the best of it, or (as he would say) the right of it, in her chafferings with the butcher, milkman, and tin-peddler. The phrase, "the stern ethics that sparkles on his chisel-edge," is happily expressive of the essay's tenor.

Emerson's philosophy can be distilled from "Self-Reliance" and "Compensation"—though I cannot flatter myself that I have done so. The other essays we shall have to dismiss all too summarily. "Friendship" satisfies few readers and "Love" appears to make the commentators mad, in both senses. "Art" pleases no artist. "Circles," "Spiritual Laws," and "The Over-

Soul" belong to the arcana of Emersonianism, and will leave many readers cold. In the Preface to the English edition, Carlyle speaks of them as "notions and half-notions of a metaphysic, theosophic kind. . . . In a very enigmatic way, we hear much of the 'Universal Soul of the,' etc., flickering like bright bodiless Northern streamers." But he beautifully calls the book "the soliloquy of a true soul under the stars, in this day."

The trouble with the essay on Friendship is that the author, like Agag, comes delicately. He never quite lets himself go. A relation that is compact of emotion is cooled by the wind of words. And yet there is really nothing in it that one can roundly challenge as false or even inadequate. There were few subjects on which his mind dwelt oftener or more warmly. Almost every idea in the essay can be found in the Journals, but perhaps in that fact may be found one source of the chilliness to which so many have objected; for the essay, instead of being thrown off in the glow of an immediate emotion, is rather a compilation of reflections recorded over years. Besides, although Emerson showed throughout life a pervasive friendliness, it seems never to have concentrated its beams into a focus. We have seen how many of the entries in the earlier Journals express at times a wistful, at times a remorseful, sense of his inability to "give all to love." Finally, as an uncompromising individualist, he perhaps cannot be expected to show his greatest force in discussing relations, such as friendship and love, of which the essence is the submergence of one individual spirit in another. One feels that he perceives the truth,

but perceives it intellectually as several ideas. The ideas are never completely fused or integrated in the fires of emotion. It is the general effect, then, of the essay on friendship that fails, rather than any part of it. In the number and nobility of its reflections on a subject which can never be treated satisfactorily, it does not lose by comparison with the essays of Cicero, Montaigne, and Bacon.

Just what it is in the essay on Love that has roused the critics it is hard to see, for he anticipates every one of their objections. At the beginning, he says: "The delicious fancies of youth reject the least savour of a mature philosophy, as chilling with age and pedantry their purple bloom. And therefore I incur the imputation of unnecessary hardness and stoicism from those who compose the Court and Parliament of Love. But from these formidable censors I shall appeal to my seniors." And, later: "I have been told that in some public discourses of mine reverence for the intellect has made me unjustly cold to the personal relations. But now I almost shrink at the remembrance of such disparaging words. For persons are love's world, and the coldest philosopher cannot recount the debt of the young soul wandering here in nature to the power of love, without being tempted to unsay, as treasonable to nature, aught derogatory to the social instincts." And he is very careful to give due weight to each step in the growth of the passion, from the first shy glances of boy and girl to the last transcendent vision of "love celestial." But perhaps the word "careful" indicates the weakness of his discussion. The

whole suggests a fracture of blood from brain—a "stand-offish," rationalizing, disintegrating survey by a man who had never been in love. It is certainly here that one feels most completely what Mr. Chapman calls his "anæmic incompleteness."

In his poems, as here, he is obviously Platonic in his notions. The curious poem, "Initial, Dæmonic, and Celestial Love," on which he spent a great deal of time, develops the idea, touched on here, that love between the sexes is only the beginning and is—or rather should be—transcended as soon as possible. It is sublimed in a love of Nature or Beauty, and that in its turn in a love of mankind and virtue. No doubt this evolution is natural and common, and one can reverence the loftiness of the conception, but still can feel that in the process of rationalizing the emotion, the passion has evaporated. His treatment of "initial" love is so meagre, so completely depersonalized, that the celestial love seems "bleak and gray."[1]

Pondering over these and many other enunciations on this subject, one is struck by the absence in them of the quality that has characterized the treatment of love from the troubadours to the present—romanticism, sentimentalism, eroticism, call it what we may. We forget that our attitude toward sex is largely modern and occidental. To come upon a man whose attitude is neither startles us. We call it the sap-

[1]My friend, Professor Myra Holbrook, has an anecdote of Emerson, the source of which she has forgotten. Someone said: "One can learn no more of human nature from Emerson than from an Italian opera." "Not so much," was the reply; "from an Italian opera one can at least learn that there are two sexes."

less fruit of puritanism, transcendentalism, New Englandism; and yet we ought not to forget that it would be entirely comprehensible, even entirely just, to a Greek of the age of Pericles or a Chinaman of almost any age. Implied in Emerson's sexlessness is certainly a criticism of a world that has permitted itself to become oversexed. As a criticism it has missed its effect because of our natural suspicion that a man who made instinct the centre of his philosophy has left out of adequate account that instinct which "makes the world go round." He seems afraid of it, and hastens to transcend it. He wants the wine of life to be always rectified spirits. It is amusing to turn from his gingerly treatment of physical passion to the not at all gingerly treatment of some of the present-day writers who are as much afraid of it as he.

Of his prose writing in general it may be said that it is clear, at least in the sense which Thoreau had in mind when he pronounced Carlyle the clearest of writers. And yet, about both Emerson and Carlyle, a popular tradition has grown up that they are obscure. There are two main reasons for this idea: First, the strongly idiosyncratic idiom of both; and, second, their addiction to metaphor. It is perhaps significant that each found the other obscure. Emerson's suppression of the ordinary devices of coherence or transition leads the rapid reader to conclude that he is incoherent in thought. No doubt he sometimes is, but very seldom. I think that his impatience of formal transition is in part due to his incessant reading of the old authors, Elizabethan and Seventeenth Century, in whom the verbal

and phrasal links between sentence and sentence are much less common than in the later writers of "standard prose." All such locutions are a dilution of the sense, as are all introductory phrases like "There is . . ." "It is . . .", which he also uses sparingly. In the old books of rhetoric the "three qualities of style" were enumerated as *clearness, force,* and *beauty,* and certain writers, like Carlyle and Browning, never hesitate to sacrifice the first and third for the second. Emerson, though much less flagrantly, is of the same mind. In his poetry, he carried condensation and emphasis to quite the extreme of Browning and almost to the excess of Meredith.

His favourite method of exposition, too, presents difficulties in the way of rapid comprehension, for instead of following the usual procedure, which Benjamin Franklin says is from the particular to the general or from the general to the particular, he likes to oppose two opposite general statements and let the reader discover the balance of truth between them. "It is," says Mr. Chapman, who first called attention to it, "a vivid and very legitimate mode of procedure." There is no doubt, however, that it is a merciless one. Perhaps akin to these uncompromising devices may be his love of unqualified statement, even when its need of qualification must have been evident to him. One supposes that this may have been in part the result of his platform experience. Certainly it has the rhetorical value of making one think, of challenging dissent or retort.

When we turn from his syntax to his diction, we find

that, like Carlyle, he literally could not think without metaphor. Perhaps more than any other trait in him it marks him as a poet. His notebooks are full of references to the value of the trope. Indeed, in view of his transcendental belief in the symbolic values of all things, one may say that his writings as a whole are tropical. When he was only twenty years old, he recorded the discovery that "no man is understood, who speculates on mind or character, until he borrows the emphatic imagery of sense," quoting with approval, "Sleep that knits up the ravelled sleave of Care," "How beautiful upon the mountains are their feet who bring good tidings," "The world is the scaffold of Divine Justice." Eighteen years later, he writes: "The metamorphosis of Nature shows itself in nothing more than in this, that there is no word in our language that cannot become typical to us of Nature by giving it emphasis. The world is a Dancer; it is a Rosary; it is a Torrent; it is a Boat; a Mist; a Spider's Snare; it is what you will; and the metaphor will hold, and it will give the imagination keen pleasure. . . . There is nothing small or mean to the soul. It derives as grand a joy from symbolizing the Godhead or His universe under the form of a moth or a gnat as of a Lord of Hosts. Must I call the heaven and the earth a maypole and country fair with booths, or an anthill, or an old coat, in order to give you the shock of pleasure which the imagination loves and the sense of spiritual greatness? Call it a blossom, a road, a wreath of parsley, a tamarisk-crown, a cock, a sparrow, the ear instantly hears and the spirit leaps to the trope." That

is the *rationale* of his own usage. But his use of figures also fed his liking for the florid or luxuriant in style, which may be considered a compensation for the plainness of his dress and diet.

As he grew older, it may be said that he grew fonder of the homely style and less exigent regarding logic. His earlier speeches and essays are as a rule more coherent, better outlined, and more flowing in style. And yet throughout his work one seems to detect two men: the one, demure, chaste, elevated, serene; the other, bristly and thistly, mischievous, imperious, arch, even at times lusty and pugnacious. Mr. Firkins, who has most completely analyzed his style, differentiates some fourteen moods in his prose, and the list is so instructive that it must be given, even though, without the illustrations, it will lose much of its impressiveness. He characterizes the "moods" as follows: Plainness and pith, powerful assertiveness, tingling, elastic buoyancy, exhilaration in rough strength or ferocity, high and frosty aloofness, truculence, apocalyptic wrath, youthful passion, love, benignant irony (gentle satire), benignant irony plus intimate tenderness, romanticized courtliness, heroic exaltation, beatitude. Without supposing that the list is exhaustive, we can still perceive that Emerson's style showed a remarkable versatility and many powers.

In closing this necessarily brief discussion of Emerson's prose, I shall give some specimen paragraphs, which may be considered to be fairly representative of his tones or manners.

(1) "Why should we import rags and relics into

the new hour? Nature abhors the old, and old age seems the only disease; all others run into this one. We call it by many names—fever, intemperance, insanity, stupidity, and crime; they are all forms of old age; they are rest, conservatism, appropriation, inertia, not newness, not the way onward. We grizzle every day, I see no need of it. Whilst we converse with what is above us, we do not grow old, but grow young. Infancy, youth, receptive, aspiring, with religious eye looking upward, counts itself nothing, and abandons itself to the instruction flowing from all sides. But the man and woman of seventy assume to know all, they have outlived their hope, they renounce aspiration, accept the actual for the necessary, and talk down to the young. Let them, then, become organs of the Holy Ghost; let them be lovers; let them behold truth; and their eyes are uplifted, their wrinkles smoothed, they are perfumed again with hope and power. This old age ought not to creep on a human mind. In nature every moment is new; the past is always swallowed and forgotten; the coming only is sacred. Nothing is secure but life, transition, the energizing spirit. No love can be bound by oath or covenant to secure it against a higher love. No truth so sublime but it may be trivial to-morrow in the light of new thoughts. People wish to be settled; only as far as they are unsettled is there any hope for them."

(2) "They"—the English—"drink brandy like water, cannot expend their quantities of waste strength on riding, hunting, swimming, and fencing, and run into absurd follies with the gravity of the Eumenides. They

stoutly carry into every nook and corner of the earth their turbulent sense; leaving no lie uncontradicted; no pretension unexamined. They chew hasheesh; cut themselves with poisoned creases, swing their hammock in the boughs of the Bohun Upas, taste every poison, buy every secret; at Naples, they put St. Januarius's blood in an alembic; they saw a hole into the head of the 'winking virgin,' to know why she winks; measure with an English footrule every cell of the inquisition, every Turkish Caaba, every Holy of Holies; translate and send to Bentley the arcanum, bribed and bullied away from shuddering Bramins; and measure their own strength by the terror they cause."

(3) "In this refulgent summer, it has been a luxury to draw the breath of life. The grass grows, the buds burst, the meadow is spotted with fire and gold in the tint of flowers. The air is full of birds, and sweet with the breath of the pine, the balm-of-Gilead, and the new hay. Night brings no gloom to the heart with its welcome shade. Through the transparent darkness the stars pour their almost spiritual rays. Man under them seems a young child, and his huge globe a toy. The cool night bathes the world as with a river, and prepares his eyes again for the crimson dawn. The mystery of nature was never displayed more happily. The corn and the wine have been freely dealt to all creatures, and the never-broken silence with which the old bounty goes forward has not yielded yet one word of explanation. One is constrained to respect the perfection of this world in which our senses converse. How wide; how rich; what invitation from every property

it gives to every faculty of man! In its fruitful soils; in its navigable sea; in its animals; in its chemical ingredients; in the powers and path of light, heat, attraction and life, it is well worth the pith and heart of great men to subdue and enjoy it. The planters, the mechanics, the inventors, the astronomers, the builders of cities, and the captains, history delights to honour."

(4) "He is a good man who can receive a gift well. We are either glad or sorry at a gift, and both emotions are unbecoming. Some violence, I think, is done, some degradation borne, when I rejoice or grieve at a gift. I am sorry when my independence is invaded, or when a gift comes from such as do not know my spirit, and so the act is not supported; and if the gift pleases me overmuch, then I should not be ashamed that the donor should read my heart, and see that I love his commodity, and not him. The gift, to be true, must be the flowing of the giver into me, correspondent to my flowing into him. When the waters are level, then my goods pass to him, and his to me. All his are mine, all mine his. I say to him, How can you give me this pot of oil, or this flagon of wine, when all your oil and wine is mine, which belief of mine this gift seems to deny? Hence the fitness of beautiful, not useful things for gifts. This giving is flat usurpation, and therefore when the beneficiary is ungrateful, as all beneficiaries hate all Timons, not at all considering the value of the gift, but looking back to the greater store it was taken from, I rather sympathize with the beneficiary than with the anger of my Lord Timon. For, the expecta-

tion of gratitude is mean, and is continually punished by the total insensibility of the obliged person. It is a great happiness to get off without injury and heart-burning, from one who has had the ill-luck to be served by you. It is a very onerous business, this of being served, and the debtor naturally wishes to give you a slap. A golden text for these gentlemen is that which I so admire in the Buddhist, who never thanks, and who says, 'Do not flatter your benefactors.' "

The second series of *Essays,* published in 1844, is generally considered inferior to the first, but it contains the curious and daring "Experience," the delicate and ingenious "Gifts," the amusing "New England Reformers." And there are the fervidly spiritual "The Poet," the manly "Character," the courtly "Manners." Perhaps it is chiefly the absence of the "wingy mysteries and airy subtleties" of "The World-Soul," "Circles," and "Compensation" that makes this volume seem at first a little thin. When published, it was better received than the earlier series.

In the essay "Experience" occurs a passage that has been little noticed but that is in some ways remarkable. It concerns "that horrid burden and impediment of the soul, which the churches call Sin." "We believe in ourselves as we do not believe in others. We permit all things to ourselves, and that which we call sin in others is experiment for us. It is an instance of our faith in ourselves that men never speak of crime as lightly as they think; or every man thinks a latitude safe for himself which is unwise to be indulged to another. The act looks very differently on the inside and on the out-

side; in its quality and in its consequences. Murder in the murderer is no such ruinous thought as poets and romancers will have it; it does not unsettle him or fright him from his ordinary notice of trifles; it is an act quite easy to be contemplated; but in its sequel it turns out to be a horrible jangle and confounding of all relations. Especially the crimes that spring from love seem right and fair from the actor's point of view, but when acted are found destructive of society. No man at last believes that he can be lost, or that the crime in him is as black as in the felon. Because the intellect qualifies in our own case the moral judgments. For there is no crime to the intellect. That is antinomian or hypernomian, and judges law as well as fact. 'It is worse than a crime, it is a blunder,' said Napoleon, speaking the language of the intellect. To it, the world is a problem in mathematics or the science of quantity, and it leaves out praise and blame and all weak emotions. All stealing is comparative. If you come to absolutes, pray who does not steal? Saints are sad, because they behold sin (even when they speculate) from the point of view of the conscience, and not of the intellect; a confusion of thought. Sin, seen from the thought, is a diminution, or *less;* seen from the conscience or will, it is pravity or bad. The intellect names it shade, absence of light, and no essence. The conscience must feel it as essence, essential evil. This it is not; it has an objective existence, but no subjective." It is hardly fair to use the paragraph without what follows it; and yet its tenor is that of other reflections

—the Hellenistic idea that sin is ignorance. But what a bold paragraph it is!

"Experience" is a curious and ingenious essay that has always given his critics trouble. It was, however, written in the midst of spiritual disturbance. One is impressed here and elsewhere, however, by the fact that he was hampered by an older psychology, in which the "faculties" of emotion, intellect, and will are given a specious independence of one another. The reader often wishes that he had had a clear vision of their mutual dependence.

In "Character" and "Politics," we seem to discern a shifting from intelligence as a base of life to love. In "Character" is a praise of friendship as eloquent as any he has written. "A divine person is the prophecy of the mind; a friend is the hope of the heart. Our beatitude waits for the fulfillment of these two in one." In "Politics," after various sensible though not too original comments on parties and tendencies, he reaches a high note: "The power of love, as the basis of the State, has never been tried. . . . We live in a very low state of the world, and pay unwilling tribute to governments founded on force." And his last sentence quotes with enthusiasm a friend "to whom no weight of adverse experience will make it for a moment appear impossible that thousands of human beings might exercise towards each other the grandest and simplest sentiments, as well as a knot of friends, or a pair of lovers." There is a little of Burke here, as in his political thought throughout. And there is a definite taking issue with Carlyle. Both believed in great men

and both admired power, however it might display itself, but Emerson never worshipped heroes and certainly never worshipped might or force. For him the great man, the great state, united power with benevolence. As for ordinary men, though he practised charity toward them always, he really was not interested in them. Swift once said that "I loathe the human race, but love Tom, Dick, and Harry." Emerson loathed nothing, but he might have said, "I love the human race, but as for Tom, Dick, and Harry—well . . ."

CHAPTER EIGHT

POETRY, ENGLAND, AND THE WAR

I

IN SEPTEMBER, 1844, Emerson purchased, on the shore of Walden Pond, a plot of eleven acres, to which, on the advice of friends, he added three or four more of pine woods adjoining. No purchase of his life gave him more pleasure than this. He nicknamed the plot his Garden, visited it almost daily, and composed many of his poems there. In the preceding year he first procured a copy of Saadi's *Gulistan* and was pleased to find that it agreed with the conception of the poem "Saadi" written the year before. The attraction of the Persian poets grew with the years, and his references to them or quotations from them in his later books are numerous. His general reading became more and more abstract: the Chinese classics, the *Vishnu Sarna,* Plotinus, Iamblichus, Proclus, Calvin, Behmen, Spinoza, Berkeley, are most often quoted during the years 1843–45, and the references to poetry are much less numerous than formerly. Science still interests him, and a growing interest in history and public affairs is evident. In 1846 he collected his poems.

It is a commonplace of criticism that his poetry lacks art. His chief failing in composition in general, prose and verse, was a lack of sustention, of coherence, of

architecture. His verse, like much of his prose, is spasmodic, and it contains, moreover, elementary faults of technique that Macaulay's boy of fourteen could have patched and mended—forced rhymes, arbitrary inversions, lapses of taste; at its worst a certain fuzziness of thought. It is, to use a candy-maker's term, cooked only to the granulated stage, and seldom reaches the smoothness of either the "soft ball" or the "hard ball." It is gritty.

When we seek the cause for these generally recognized defects, we are forced to conclude that they were the result partly of a habit of mind and partly of a theory of poetry. We have seen that his boyhood verse was all too facile, but as he grew older he came less and less to value smoothness and correctness in himself, though he did not cease to admire them in others. He criticized Channing's verses because of their carelessness and of the presence in them of inept lines, and yet we early find Thoreau pleading with him to be more careful of his own, marred as they were by the same faults. In his Journal he records his conviction that logic, coherence, and architectonics in a long poem are evidences of the master and, though a little grudgingly, he praises the beauty and music of Tennyson's earlier poetry. In the same passage, relating to Tennyson, however, we find the clue to his theory, for he condemns much of the English poet's work on the ground that in it the manner is superior to the matter.

There can be no doubt that a theory—many will think an unlucky theory—of poetry reinforced his tendency to think in isolated phrases, and it is pos-

sible that his habit of jotting down ideas as they occurred, without carrying on their suggestions or development at the time, was responsible in its turn for the tendency. Of course, thinking in granules, so to speak, has its strength as well as its weakness. It makes the granules memorable and penetrating, even though it sacrifices the virtues of continuity. It is easy, also, to exaggerate the discontinuity of his verse, for often it is more apparent than real. It is a discontinuity of phrasing, rather than of thought.

It is still true, nevertheless, that his theory of poetry tended to encourage and condone his technical faults. He held the same view of art as Ruskin, that the subject of a work is of the first importance and its expression always a secondary consideration. He was not, however, so careful as Ruskin to explain what he meant by subject, with the result that one cannot be sure. Nowadays we are told that not the subject, but the poet, makes a poem. I think Emerson, when he speaks of "subject," means matter or ideas, rather than the topic or pretext. At any rate, he had little tolerance for what is sometimes called pure poetry. The poet as maker moved him much less than the poet as seer.

With his insistence upon the intellectual content of poetry, it is small wonder if his own verse lacks both passion and music. Its affinities are more with the "metaphysical school" of the Seventeenth Century than with the romantic schools of the Nineteenth. One constantly comes upon snatches that might well have been written by Jonson, Donne, Herbert, or Marvell, and

we know that these were favourites of his, as is shown by his quotation from them in the Journal and by his inclusion of their poems in his anthology, *Parnassus*. He was also greatly drawn to the cryptic verse of the old Celtic bards, and, from the date of "Woodnotes" onward, liked to write in a "sort of runic rhyme," which reads more like the *Elder Edda* than like any poetry of a less barbaric age. Occasionally he strings couplets together after the manner of Blake in "Auguries of Innocence," and again loads and cramps his verse with all the tortuous obscurity of Meredith in "The Woods of Westermain."

Perhaps the worst that can be said of his poetry is that it begins with an idea instead of an emotion. But to deny that it is poetry at all, as some have done, would be possible only by limiting our definition of poetry so as to exclude a great deal of verse besides his. He is no more abstract than Shelley and no more intellectual than Donne. Critics have brought against him Milton's remark that "poetry is simple, sensuous, and passionate," forgetting that a good deal of Milton's own poetry will hardly bear the test. When all is said, it remains true, I think, that his faults are very largely faults of art or technique. He has hardly a poem that is perfect. But he also has hardly a poem that is uninteresting.

Perhaps the very impulse that militates against his success as a singer is the chief source of his success as a seer. He seems incessantly to have aimed at originality. The great lyric poems have usually been the perfect embodiment of ultimate truisms, rather than state-

ments of a new revelation. There is little else in the most-quoted passages of Shakespeare. It is not really the man who says a thing first, but he who says it best who wins the bays. And yet there is a kind of poet, of whom Blake, Herbert, and Meredith may be considered widely differing examples, who are stimulating to thought, rather than to emotion, and whose work is always fresh and fascinating because of the originality or, possibly, the oddity, of the mind that conceived it. Emerson's verse is largely of this kind, and is therefore for most readers a cultivated taste.

The originality I have spoken of seems to me still poetic. Here are some characteristic passages:

"The little Shakespeare in the maiden's heart
Makes Romeo of the ploughboy on the cart;"

. . .

"I think no virtue goes with size;
The reason of all cowardice
Is, that men are overgrown,
And, to be valiant, must come down
To the titmouse dimension."

. . .

"But in the mud and scum of things
There alway, alway, something sings."

. . .

"That book is good
Which puts me in a working mood.
Unless to Thought is added Will,
Apollo is an imbecile."

"Shines the last age, the next with hope is seen,
To-day slinks poorly off unmarked between:
Future or Past no richer secret folds,
O friendless Present! than thy bosom holds."

. . .

"One crash, the death-hymn of the perfect tree,
Declares the close of its green century."

. .

"The hand that rounded Peter's dome
And groined the aisles of Christian Rome
Wrought with a sad sincerity:
Himself from God he could not free;
He builded better than he knew;—
The conscious stone to beauty grew."

. . .

"One harvest from thy field
Homeward brought the oxen strong;
A second crop thine acres yield,
Which I gather in a song."

. . .

"Rhodora! if the sages ask thee why
This charm is wasted on the earth and sky,
Tell them, dear, that if eyes were made for seeing,
Then Beauty is its own excuse for being:
Why thou wert there, O rival of the rose!
I never thought to ask, I never knew:
But, in my simple ignorance, suppose
The self-same Power that brought me here brought you."

"I thought the sparrow's note from heaven,
Singing at dawn from the alder bough;
I brought him home in his nest at even;
He sings the song, but it cheers not now,
For I did not bring home the river and sky;—
He sang to my ear—they sang to my eye."

It will be seen that, whatever crudities such verses have, they are still marked by a sense of style. And in his greater epigrams, there is a marmoreal or inscriptional beauty that is one of the rarest of literary qualities:

" 'Tis man's perdition to be safe,
When for the truth he ought to die."

. . .

"So nigh is grandeur to our dust,
So near is God to man,
When Duty whispers low, *Thou Must,*
The youth replies, *I can.*"

. . .

"Teach me your moods, O patient stars!
Who climb each night the ancient sky,
Leaving on space no shade, no scars,
No trace of age, no fear to die."

Along with the oracular, he possessed so true a lyric note that one deeply regrets that he did not more often achieve it. In "Give All to Love," "Earth Song," the Ellen poems, passages of "Woodnotes," and "May-Day," and here and there in "My Garden," "Waldeinsamkeit," the "Concord Ode," "Two

Rivers," his verse reaches the kindling point; and in the stately reflective lyric, like "The Snow-Storm," "Days," "The Day's Ration," "Musketaquid," he attains a classic calm and quiet.

Certain of his longer poems have considerable autobiographical interest. "Uriel" was inspired by the Divinity School incident; the "Ode to Channing," by the abolition movement; "Voluntaries," in part by the death of Robert Gould Shaw; "My Garden," by the tract of ground on Walden Pond. Eminently characteristic, also, and among his best are such riddle poems as "Uriel," "The Sphinx," "Brahma," and "The Song of Nature." A group, of which "Merlin" and "Saadi" and the fragments of "The Poet" are representative, have value as expressing his conceptions of poetry. And in almost all of his poems, but especially in the longest, "May-Day," are fresh and lively images drawn from a landscape indubitably New England. Perhaps his most earthy will always have the widest appeal.

He can hardly by any definition be called a great poet, but he will always have his lovers. His future reputation is likely to be that of his admired Seventeenth Century men—to be read by a discriminating few, who like what Rossetti called "fundamental gray-matter" in their poetry. His influence upon American poetry, though not clearly traceable, has probably been strong in persuading poets to turn from English larks and daisies to American chickadees and sumach. Emily Dickinson would have gladly called him Master. Robert Frost is Emersonian in philosophy and

diction, but shows little of his influence in his subjects or his verse.

II

Between 1845 and 1847, Emerson found himself in one of those periods of restlessness and unproductivity which he called solstices of the mind. His Journals and letters contain many mournful references to his need of refreshment. When an invitation came, therefore, from friends in England to lecture there, he accepted, though with hesitation. He dreaded any imputation of self-advertisement, but he longed to see old friends.

He sailed for Liverpool on the fifth of October, 1847, and proceeded almost at once to London, where he visited the Carlyles in Chelsea. "At ten at night," he writes in a letter to his wife, "the door was opened to me by Jane Carlyle, and the man himself was behind her with a lamp in the entry. They were very little changed from their old selves of fourteen years ago (in August), when I left them at Craigenputtock. 'Well,' said Carlyle, 'here we are, shovelled together once more.' The floodgates of his talk are quickly opened, and the river is a great and constant stream. We had large communication that night until nearly one o'clock, and at breakfast next morning it began again. At noon or later we went together, Carlyle and I, to Hyde Park and the palaces . . . the National Gallery, and to the Strand—Carlyle melting all Westminster and London down into his talk and laughter as he walked. . . . An immense talker he is, and altogether as extraordinary in his conversation as in his

writings—I think even more so. You will never discover his real vigour and range, or how much more he might do than he ever has done, without seeing him. I find my few hours' discourse with him in Scotland, long ago, gave me not enough knowledge of him, and I have now at last been taken by surprise."

He attended one of the breakfasts of Samuel Rogers, banker and poet, heard James Martineau preach and "drank tea" with him, visited the Abbey, called on George Bancroft, enjoyed the "dream-like" experience of walking in a London fog. In December he travelled to Manchester and Birmingham, lecturing, his tour arranged by Alexander Ireland, who was later to write his life. In Manchester his serenity was shaken by the condition of the women and children of the poor. Everywhere he was received so cordially that his "admiration and love of the English rose every day." He dined with Stephenson the engineer, whom he describes as "one of the most remarkable men I have seen in England"; attended a Free-Trade Banquet, at which Cobden, Bright, and Fox spoke; called on Robert Chambers, author of *Vestiges of Creation,* and on Professor Wilson; listened to lectures by Wilson and Sir William Hamilton; visited Lord Jeffrey, De Quincey, Harriet Martineau, Wordsworth; inspected the astronomical observatory of Professor Nichol and the chemical laboratory of Dr. Samuel Brown. His travels took him to Edinburgh and Perth, and back to Ambleside, specially to see Wordsworth, and he reached London again in February. Here he visited or dined with Milnes, Macaulay, Milman,

Lyell, Hallam, Proctor (Barry Cornwall), Forster, Kinglake, Mrs. Jameson, Owen, Thackeray, Wilberforce, Helen Fawcett, Crabbe Robinson, Lady Palmerston, Disraeli, Palgrave, Froude, Clough, Lockhart, Croker, Coventry Patmore, Dickens ("whom I like well"), and a hundred others less known to fame, but perhaps as stimulating. It is worthy of note, also, that he especially enjoyed meetings of the Society of Antiquaries and of the Geological Club, and visits to Kew and the British Museum. He was made honorary member of the Athenæum and Reform Clubs.

Of Tennyson he says: "I was contented with him at once. . . . Quiet, sluggish thought and sense; refined, as all English are, and good-humoured. There is in him an air of general superiority that is very satisfactory. . . . Carlyle thinks him the best man in England to smoke a pipe with, and uses much to see him; had a place in his little garden, on the wall, where Tennyson's pipe was laid up." He is delighted with some anecdotes of Milnes concerning his old idol Landor: "He told that Landor one day in a towering rage, threw his cook out of the window, and then presently exclaimed, 'Good God, I never thought of those violets!' The last time he saw Landor he found him expatiating on our custom of eating in company, which he esteems barbarous. He eats alone, with half-closed windows, because the light interferes with the taste. He has lately heard of some tribe in Crim Tartary who have the practice of eating alone, and these he extols as much superior to the English." "Macaulay is the king of diners-out. I do not know when I have seen such wonderful

vivacity. He has the strength of ten men. . . . You would say he was the best type in England." "Carlyle declaimed a little in the style of that raven prophet who cried 'Woe to Jerusalem,' just before its fall. But Carlyle finds little reception even in this company, where some were his warm friends. All his methods included a good deal of killing, and he does not see his way very clear or far. The aristocrats say, 'Put that man in the House of Commons, and you will hear no more of him.' "

After attending a great dinner, he writes his wife: "Pray, after this ostentation of my fashionable acquaintance, do you believe that my rusticities are smoothed down, and my bad manners mended? Not in the smallest degree. I have not acquired the least facility, nor can hope to. But I do not decline these opportunities, as they are all valuable to me, who would, at least, know how that 'other half of the world' lives." His thoughts constantly fly homeward. He had left Thoreau in charge of the household. "Our Spartan-Buddhist Henry is *père* or *bonhomme maglré lui,* and it is a daily comfort to think of him there with you." Children on the street remind him of his little daughter, and he gives them pennies. He cannot get enough letters from his family. But his own letters show clearly that he is enjoying himself immensely.

In May he crossed to Paris, just in time to witness an abortive revolution. His companion here was Arthur Hugh Clough, who, it will be remembered, later, in 1852, on the advice of Emerson, came to reside for a while in Cambridge. Emerson heard La-

martine speak in the Chamber, attended a soirée at De Toqueville's, called on Quinet, Lamennais, and others, but in general lived quietly in lodgings, preparing another series of lectures to be delivered in London in June. He finds Paris attractive. "I find Paris a place of the largest liberty that is, I suppose, in the civilized world; and I am thankful for it, just as I am for etherization, as a resource when the accident of any hideous surgery threatens me; so Paris in the contingency of my ever needing a place of diversion and independence. . . . All winter I have been admiring the English and disparaging the French. Now in these weeks I have been correcting my prejudice." What delights him in the Parisians is their free democracy and their joyousness.

Back in London, he finds that his lectures—the lectures of the Massachusetts Indian, as he calls himself—are a social event of the first importance. People who do not come to hear him, come to look at others. "Carlyle makes loud Scottish-Covenanter gruntings of laudation." Some of the audience are alert for subversive remarks from the speaker, but none are made that are very shocking. Lord Morpeth, the Duchess of Sutherland, Lady Byron, send him cards of invitation. He visits Leigh Hunt, whom he well likes; the Duke of Argyle pilots him over Stafford House; and Stanfield, the painter, takes him to the collection of Turners at Tottenham. Sir Richard Owen, the anatomist, shows him his museum. Lord Lovelace reads him a scientific paper. And so on, day after day. He finds the same "deoxygenation and asphyxia" that he has always

found in the word, "a party," but he admits to a correspondent that he will leave England with an increased respect for Englishmen. His respect, he says, is the more generous that he has no sympathy with them, only admiration.

The London lectures were not as successful as he and his friends had hoped. He had expected £200 as his profits, but received only £80. He accounted for this disappointment on the ground of English dislike of unpractical or inconclusive speeches. But no doubt he overlooked the fact that his London audience was very different from the average American audience.

Crabbe Robinson, who disliked him before he saw him, notes in his diary for April 22, 1846:

> I had the curiosity to look at him at Lord Northampton's, a fortnight ago; when, in an instant, all my dislike vanished. He has one of the most interesting countenances I ever beheld—a combination of intelligence and sweetness that quite disarmed me.

A few days later, Robinson writes in a letter:

> Tuesday, I heard Emerson's first lecture, "On the Laws of Thought"; one of those rhapsodical exercises of mind, like Coleridge's "Table Talk" and Carlyle's in his lectures, which leave a dreamy sense of pleasure, not easy to analyze, or render an account of. . . . I can do no better than tell you what Harriet Martineau says of him, which, I think, admirably describes his character of mind. "He is a man so *sui generis,* that I do not wonder at his not being apprehended till he is seen. His influence is of a curious sort. There is a vague nobleness and thorough sweetness about him which move people to their very depths, without their being able to tell why. The logicians have an incessant triumph over him, but their triumph is of no avail. He conquers minds, as well as hearts, wherever he goes; and without convincing anybody's reason of any one thing, exalts their reason, and makes their minds worth more than they ever were before."

Two weeks later, Robinson again heard a lecture, on "Domestic Life."

> His picture of childhood was one of his most successful sketches. I enjoyed the lecture which was, I dare say, the most liberal ever heard in Exeter Hall. . . . Those who have a passion for "clear ideas" shake their heads at what they cannot reduce to propositions as clear and indisputable as a sum in arithmetic.

These impressions of a very typical Englishman give, however, only one side of the story. Here and there were idealists, mostly young, for whom Emerson was an apostle. We read of one young collegian who withdrew from all of the examinations at the university after reading him, apparently because he now considered academic learning supererogatory. Mr. Ireland has gathered many other testimonies to his influence. Certainly the young Englishman of intelligence has always found his Platonism attractive.

The lectures delivered in England had the following titles: "Books," "Natural Aristocracy," "Powers and Laws of Thought," "Relation of Intellect to Natural Science," "Tendencies and Duties of Men of Thought," "Politics and Socialism," "Poetry and Eloquence," "Napoleon," "Shakespeare," and "Domestic Life." A few subjects were new, and most were used again under other titles, after his return to this country. The "Napoleon" and "Shakespeare" were first studies for chapters in *Representative Men.*

III

Although *English Traits* was not published until 1855, this is the best place in which to consider it, for

its materials were mostly collected during the second visit to England. It is the most intimate and readable of his books, the best planned, the most free from abstractness. Throughout it is sunny, generous, and serene.

The book has some historical interest. During the decade of the 'thirties, the curiosity of England about America was insatiable. The books of Basil Hall and Mrs. Trollope had been bitter medicine to Americans, even though less prominent visitors had written in friendlier spirit. In the next decade, *Martin Chuzzlewit* and *American Notes* had aroused positive wrath and, as Carlyle said, "all Yankee-doodle-dom blazed up like one universal soda bottle." Meanwhile, Irving, in 1820–1822, had presented with Addisonian suavity a picture of England which could offend no one, and Cooper, in 1837, had tried to explain each nation to the other, without being thanked for his pains. A host of minor writers of both countries contributed to the controversy, until it took on the proportions of a petty literary war. It is characteristic of Emerson that he paid not the slightest attention to it. In view of his expressed attitude toward American provincialism and imitation of things English, it is all the more noteworthy that he took so much pains to speak without heat or prejudice.

In *English Traits* one detects two motifs—a somewhat fastidious idealism and an admiration of strength. What Arnold later called Philistinism shocks Emerson much less than might have been anticipated; the good manners of the aristocracy—Arnold's barbarians—

compensate for their want of idealism; English staunchness and stubbornness are very good things as far as they go. Cockayne, as he nicknames the racial eccentricity which Henry Adams deplores in the *Education,* amuses him and he becomes genially anecdotal about it. The universities are pretty bad, but probably will improve; the London *Times* fills him with awe as the portentous symbol of power. Concerning English literature and religion he is severe, because they lack "the one thing needful," spirituality or idealism. But he finds that Englishmen have never been lacking to espouse high and dangerous causes.

Along with devotion to high causes, he finds as a distinctive mark of the English character a strong common sense, a rude strength newly applied to thought, "as of sailors and soldiers who have lately learnt to read." These two traits, which he discusses on successive pages—that is, idealism and strength—were to be the two main tests he was to apply to his representative men. Where he found the one or the other, he was satisfied that he had found a man.

Representative Men, which, as we have seen, was planned and partly written in England, was published in 1850. In the same month Margaret Fuller Ossoli, returning from Italy, was shipwrecked and drowned, with her husband and child, on Fire Island beach. Emerson's comment, in his Journal, is singularly reserved, not to say callous. There can be no doubt that, with all his admiration, his feeling for her must be numbered among the "imperfect sympathies." He protested, it is true, against the popular identification of

her with the Zenobia of the *Blithedale Romance,* speaking of her rich and brilliant genius, and he never failed to accord her abilities the credit they deserved. Nevertheless, his self-protective instincts bristled in her presence. Holmes says that she made him laugh too much—a strange reason for dislike, but possibly suggestive. Someone else records that she "applied herself to her companion as the sponge applies itself to water." For most persons such intensity was both flattering and winning, but for Emerson it was an assault upon his personal isolation and integrity. Margaret's feeling for him is an interesting study.

Representative Men is really a third book of essays. I mean that it can hardly be read as either history or biography. It is a series of applications of his principles to men who have attained greatness, a weighing of human greatness in the scales of the Ideal Theory.

But it is a mistake to make too much of the personal equation, as if Emerson, in portraying others, was only portraying himself. Much has been made of this idea, from the earliest reviewer to the latest critic. Holmes propounded what has become a commonplace, when he said:

> There is hardly any book of his better worth study by those who wish to understand not Plato, not Plutarch, not Napoleon, but Emerson himself. . . . Emerson holds the mirror up to them at just such an angle that we see his own face as well as that of his hero.

In a sense, the warning is justified, but hardly more than it might be of Johnson's *Lives of the Poets* or Strachey's *Eminent Victorians.* If Emerson fails to

achieve "objectivity," he fails in illustrious company. And completely objective biography is as a rule unreadable. He was not writing articles for the *Dictionary of National Biography*. He was writing a book on ethics, using the most vivid method ever devised, the method of Plutarch—the man who more than anyone else except Plato influenced his mind.

Sir Leslie Stephen, first editor of the noble reference work just mentioned and admirable biographer himself, speaking of Carlyle's *Cromwell,* protests that the

> "biographical" view of history implies the weakness, not only of unqualified approval of all Cromwell's actions, but of omitting any attempt to estimate the Protector's real relations to the social and political development of the time.

No doubt, Carlyle's doctrine of heroes deserves the criticism, for it did lead him to ignore "real relations." But his concern was primarily with ideal relations, and there is surely a place in historical literature for a moral interpretation of men and events. His *French Revolution* flagrantly neglects just the economic and social causes and background of which the modern "scientific" historian makes so much. It is, nevertheless, a great book, because it supplies what most scientific historians omit—the ethical and poetic interpretation of men making, not perhaps the Revolution, but a revolution. I mean that such writers as Plutarch, Carlyle, and Emerson make parables rather than write history.

Emerson's poetical interpretation by no means led him to approve all the actions of his subjects. In fact, it led him in the end to disapprove of them all. Carlyle

saw unerringly that Emerson's conclusions—the end of each lecture, in fact—were his real subject. As usual he found them puzzling, for he was never able to follow his friend very far beyond the earth. His comment on the "Swedenborg" is both characteristic and amusing: " 'Missed the consummate flower and divine ultimate elixir of Philosophy,' say you? By Heaven, in clutching at *it,* and almost getting it, he has tumbled into Bedlam—which is a terrible *miss,* if it were never so *near!* A miss fully as good as a mile, I should say." But he admitted the "likeness" of the portraits, even though he dissented from the conclusions.

There are six portraits, Plato, the Philosopher; Swedenborg, the Mystic; Montaigne, the Skeptic; Shakespeare, the Poet; Napoleon, the Man of the World; and Goethe, the Writer, with an introductory essay on the Uses of Great Men. Probably no book of Emerson's is a better *first* book for the young reader, or one by which he will more pleasantly initiate himself into Emerson's principles and ideas. But it will do more than that, for it is a book of wide horizons and of genuine gusto. Concerned primarily with an idealistic view of the world, it still contains passages of a quite dramatic realism, such as the pictures of Socrates, Montaigne, Napoleon. Perhaps the poorest essay is that on Goethe, but Goethe seems to defy description and analysis. The Shakespeare, the Napoleon, and the Montaigne are certainly masterly.

I have said much about the essay on Montaigne in my Introduction, because it contains one of the most explicit statements and defences of Emerson's philos-

ophy, but I must spare room for a similar passage, from the essay on Plato, because it furnishes another key to the attitude of Emerson himself. After calling Plato "a balanced soul," "a man who could see two sides of a thing," he proceeds: "The balanced soul came. If he loved abstract truth, he saved himself by propounding the most popular of all principles, the absolute good, which rules rulers, and judges the judge. If he made transcendental distinctions, he fortified himself by drawing all his illustrations from sources disdained by orators and polite conversers; from mares and puppies; from pitchers and soup-ladles; from cooks and criers; the shops of potters, horse-doctors, butchers and fishmongers. He cannot forgive in himself a partiality, but is resolved that the two poles of thought shall appear in his statement. His argument and his sentence are self-poised and spherical. The two poles appear; yes, and become two hands, to grasp and appropriate his own. Every great artist has been such by synthesis. Our strength is transitional, alternating; or, shall I say, a thread of two strands. The seashore, sea seen from shore, shore seen from sea; the taste of two metals in contact; and our enlarged powers at the approach and at the departure of a friend; the experience of poetic creativeness, which is not found in staying at home, nor yet in travelling, but in transitions from one to the other, which must therefore be adroitly managed to present as much transitional surface as possible; this command of two elements must explain the power and the charm of Plato. Art expresses the one or the same by the different.

Thought seeks to know unity in unity; poetry to show it in variety; that is, always by an object or symbol. Plato keeps the two vases, one of æther and one of pigment, at his side, and invariably uses both. Things used as language are inexhaustibly attractive. Plato turns incessantly the obverse and the reverse of the medal of Jove."

That, I think, is a description of Emerson's mind, whatever it may be of Plato's, and it indicates what gives to Emerson's writings their special flavour and appeal, in this book as elsewhere. It is what kept him from being "a tedious archangel." It is his incessant oscillation between the abstract and the concrete, his tenacious hold on fact, however high he may fly in the empyrean of speculation. He called it polarity. The concrete and the abstract were hemispherical, and the hemispheres were represented by the mystic and the man of action, by Swedenborg and Napoleon. But he could admire both, with whatever reservations. "I admire great men of all classes," he says, "those who stand for facts, and for thoughts. I like rough and smooth. I like a master standing firm on legs of iron. . . . But I find him greater when he can abolish himself and all heroes, by letting the element of reason . . . into our thought." The man of action and the mystic were, after all, only half men. The shortage of each would have made the abundance of the other.

As he had said at the end of his essay on the Poet, he finds no poet who fulfills his specifications, so here he finds no man who is "spherical." His eyes were on a Man against the Sky, and compared with that colossus

even the greatest of earth were dwarfed. And yet, great men, whatever their imperfections, "are a collyrium to clear our eyes from egotism and enable us to see other people and their works." "We love to be associated with heroic persons, since our receptivity is unlimited; and, with the great, our thoughts and manners easily become great. We are all wise in capacity, though so few in energy. There needs but one wise man in a company and all are wise, so rapid is the contagion." But—there is always a *but* in Emerson—"No man, in all the procession of famous men, is reason or illumination or that essence we are looking for; but is an exhibition, in some quarter, of new possibilities." His object is to distill out of great reputations the essence which he calls the "genius of humanity." Once more he is following the old search. If the history of mankind is really the history of one Man, he is seeking to isolate that Man.

IV

During the decade, 1850 to 1860, the question of slavery overshadowed all other national affairs. Congress found difficulty in transacting any business not in some way related to it. The passage of the Compromise Measures of the former year, and especially of the clause known as the Fugitive Slave Law, with the speeches of Calhoun, Clay, and Webster, was a prelude to ten years of hatred and chaos. The year 1852 saw the election of Hawthorne's friend, Franklin Pierce, as President, and the practical extinction of the Whig Party, which for Emerson had been a symbol of

expediency and compromise. The brutality with which the Fugitive Slave Law was executed and Webster's speech (the "Seventh of March Speech") in support of the measure, affected Emerson more profoundly and roused him to a greater display of ire than any other public event of his life. In 1856, the Republican Party came into existence, and although its candidate was defeated in 1856, the election of the Democrat, Buchanan, showed that henceforth the political struggle was to be between the North and South. It was evident that the end of any possible political settlement of the great dispute was near.

The Dred Scott decision of 1857 roused the bitterness of the North still further, and John Brown's raid on Harper's Ferry, in 1859, with his execution two months later, provided the Northern cause with a "martyr" and a song.

In considering Emerson's attitude toward abolition and the war, it is well to remember that till the actual bombardment of Fort Sumter the people of the North had as a whole little realization of the seriousness of the struggle. As late as 1860 the Northern statesmen were still dreaming of compromise and proposing it, and even the most fiery of the abolitionists foresaw nothing but "a little blood-letting." The mass of the people in the North had not only no desire for war but no very intense feeling about secession.

We have already seen that after he had conquered his fastidious dislike of the early abolitionists, he came slowly to side with them, because of his recognition of the justice of their cause. His hatred of oppression in

any form was early illustrated by a letter which he wrote, in 1838, to President Van Buren, protesting against the expulsion of the Cherokees from their lands. It is given in full in Appendix D of Cabot's Memoir. It is a remarkable document and should be read by anyone who has thought that Emerson was "pigeon livered and lacked gall to make oppression bitter." Here, under terms of the utmost urbanity, flashes a sword of invective. His contention is that the act will be no more dangerous to the Cherokees than to the nation itself. If put into effect, he says, "the name of this nation, hitherto sweet omen of religion and liberty, will stink to the world." The letter did no good: indeed, as Mr. Cabot says, "that sleek patriot, Van Buren, probably never read it."

Concerning this letter, Emerson writes in his Journal: "This stirring in the philanthropic mud gives me no peace." And it never gave him peace. He felt that his work lay elsewhere. But, although he has been accused of ignoring conscience in his works, he never ignored it in his life. His Aunt Mary had counselled him as a boy always to do what he was afraid to do. Perhaps doing what he disliked was even a higher virtue, because it lacked the excitement of danger.

Feeling as he did about the Cherokees, it is no wonder that he lost all placidity when his boyhood idol, Webster, seemed to him a renegade from the cause of abolition. No incident of his life filled him with such wrath as this. When the war finally broke, he was frankly glad. His Journals are full of notes on the benefits of the war. He looked upon it as a purgative

and a tonic for the general conscience. It swept away pettiness, short views, egotism, avarice. It brought about generosity, coöperation, heroism.

His attitude on reform may be summarized as follows: He stood for liberty on every public question and in every activity of the spirit—religion, literature, education, slavery, women's rights,—and for altruism in politics and trade. His views were often called visionary and poetic by the very men who lived to see all of them vindicated. In 1837 he had said to the young scholars: "If the single man plant himself indomitably on his instincts, and there abide, the world will come round to him." He did just that, and in fifty years the world had come round to him.

Though the most pacific of men, he did not lack physical courage. On two occasions his public utterances were interrupted by hisses and groans. "If I were dumb," he said, "yet would I have gone and mowed and muttered or made signs." He called John Brown a new saint, than whom "none purer or more brave was ever led by love of men into conflict and death." Visiting Charlestown Navy Yard, he remarked, "Sometimes gunpowder smells sweet." Bull Run did not shake his equanimity. He never faltered in his faith that the cause he believed in would triumph. Actual war was much better than the duplicity and acrimony that preceded it and, besides, war was a setting, an opportunity for heroism. All its horrors could not outweigh its efficacy as a prophylactic.

In 1862 he went to Washington to speak on American Civilization, and introduced into his lecture some

paragraphs on the necessity of emancipation. He met Lincoln, who impressed him more favourably than he had hoped. In the same year he delivered in Boston the address on the Emancipation Proclamation, which is one of his most eloquent. On January 1st of the next year—the day on which the Proclamation went into effect—he read the famous "Boston Hymn," incoherent, even crude, but containing a memorable stanza:

> "Pay ransom to the owner
> And fill the bag to the brim.
> Who is the owner? The slave is the owner,
> And ever was. Pay him."

To the opening of the war he had advocated the purchase of the slaves by the government, but the course of events and of his own thinking had brought him to the opinion that emancipation was the only feasible solution of the problem.

During the decade that included the war, he read newspapers assiduously and interested himself in politics as never before or again. He was troubled by his college memories of Southern boys and by his recollection of his tour in Florida, for he always admired and a little envied the "haughty, wilful, generous, unscrupulous" temper of the Southerner, and he knew, long before it was illustrated by events, that Southern dash and spontaneity would win a temporary advantage in a clash. The Northerner has always the advantage at the end of ten years, he had said, and the Southerner always has the advantage to-day. He was, moreover, never able to counterfeit a rage

against an institution of long standing. His reflective disposition compelled him always to allow for the other man's right. Slave-holding, therefore, never impressed him as an unadulterated wrong. His final uncompromising stand against it was actuated far less by pity for the slave than by fear for the country. In the long run, he maintained again and again, the holder of slaves would stultify his soul and debauch national conscience.

His eulogy of John Brown led to the cancelling of lectures, and for two years he gave none at all in Boston. In April, 1861, however, in the midst of a course on "Life and Literature," he introduced one on "Civilization at a Pinch," inspired by the attack on Fort Sumter, in which he declared that the populace had proved themselves wiser than their teachers. The spontaneous eloquence of ordinarily quiet citizens pleased him greatly. His positive joy in the war was the fruit of a conviction expressed in the familiar line of the "Ode to Channing," that things are in the saddle and ride mankind. Property had proved too much for men and they had degenerated into prudent and cautious "householders." The war swept that away. Never, in his view, had the South appeared so gallant, the North so cleansed of the ills that had filled him with foreboding.

In 1863, the "darkest period of the war," he rebuked his fellow citizens for their half-heartedness, which he ascribed to the prevalence of English tradition and sentiment. His attitude is imperishably expressed in the great quatrain:

"Though love repine, and reason chafe,
There came a voice without reply,—
'Tis man's perdition to be safe,
When for the truth he ought to die."

When Lincoln was reëlected in 1864, Emerson's letters, Journals, and speeches all express thanksgiving. Although for the two years preceding he had had almost no income, and for a time faced definite pecuniary difficulty, he reminded himself of the distress of his neighbours. And it was far better, he thought, to suffer any hardship from the war than to sink back into the old "rottenness."

In 1863 he was appointed by the President a visitor at West Point. John Burroughs saw him there and in a letter described him as follows:

My attention was attracted to this eager, alert, inquisitive farmer, as I took him to be. Evidently, I thought, this is a new thing to him: he feels the honour that has been conferred upon him, and he means to do his duty and let no fact or word or thing escape him. When the rest of the Board looked dull or fatigued or perfunctory, he was all eagerness and attention. He certainly showed a kind of rustic curiosity and simplicity. When, on going home at night, I learned that Emerson was on that Board of Visitors at the Academy, I knew at once that I had seen him, and the thought kept me from sleep. The next day I was early on the ground with a friend of mine who had met Emerson, and through him made his acquaintance and had a chat with him. In the afternoon, seeing us two hanging about, he left his associates and came over and talked with us and beamed on us in that inimitable way. I shall never forget his serene, unflinching look. Just the way his upper lip shut into his lower, imbedded itself there, showed me the metal of which he was made.

V

During the years of the war, Emerson's greatest social pleasure was in the meetings of the Saturday Club. At about the time when the Club was holding its first meetings, the *Atlantic Monthly* was founded and, since the same men who launched the magazine were members of the Club, the public came to look upon the latter as in some sort an appanage of the former. There was, however, no official connection between them. The first number of the *Atlantic* appeared in November, 1857. Professor James Russell Lowell was editor in chief, and most of the more prominent supporters of the defunct *Dial* were contributors. Emerson contributed, during his lifetime, twenty-eight pieces, prose and verse, among which were a number of his best poems: "Days," "Brahma," "Boston Hymn," "Saadi," and "Terminus." He was a member of the Club from the beginning, when he and two or three friends used to meet at Parker's or Will's Coffee House, in Boston, for dinner and conversation. In 1864 he notes with disapproval that a meeting was "cramped" by hurry—"a cramp which spoils a club." He disapproves of any attempt to choose one's next-hand neighbours, because such a choice instantly creates an obligation to be agreeable.

At the meeting referred to were present: James Elliot Cabot, afterward his biographer, Samuel G. Ward, Holmes, Lowell, Judge Hoar, John Murray Forbes, E. P. Whipple, Thomas G. Appleton, and one or two others; but many distinguished men besides

were members: Longfellow, Hawthorne, Motley, Dana, Pierce, the mathematician, Hunt, the painter, Dwight, the musical critic, Howe, the philanthropist, Agassiz, Sumner, Andrew, the war governor of Massachusetts, among them. Holmes says that Emerson usually sat at the "Longfellow end of the table, talking in low tones and carefully measured utterances to his neighbour, or listening, or recording any stray word worth remembering on his mental phonograph."

In 1860 appeared a new book, entitled *The Conduct of Life,* containing essays on Fate, Power, Wealth, Culture, Worship, Beauty, and Illusions. The basic assumptions are the same as in the earlier volumes; indeed, Emerson was to show no retreat during his life from the stand he adopted in *Nature* and "The American Scholar." But at fifty-seven, he is more keenly aware of facts and circumstances. Family ties and social obligations have not altered his convictions but have increased his interest in practical affairs. Certainly one finds here sweeping arraignments of society such as suggest, if not disillusionment, at least some disappointment. "The key to this age may be this, that, or the other . . . ; the key to all ages is—Imbecility; imbecility in the vast majority of men at all times, and, even in heroes, in all but certain eminent moments." "The pest of society is egotism. This goitre of egotism is so frequent among notable persons that we must infer some strong necessity in nature which it subserves." "Leave this hypocritical prating about the masses. Masses are rude, lame, unmade, pernicious in their minds, and need not to be flattered, but to be

schooled." One generally discovers, nevertheless, that such statements are made to be qualified, until they become almost grounds for optimism.

The essay on Fate is particularly interesting, because in it he very nearly argues himself into a defense of determinism, escaping only by propounding a paradox or dilemma. "If we must accept Fate, we are not less compelled to affirm liberty, the significance of the individual, the grandeur of duty, the power of character. . . . We are sure that, though we know not how, necessity does comport with liberty, the individual with the world, my polarity with the spirit of the times." Perhaps, after all, that is all one can hope to say on this insoluble problem. In the essay on Worship, he humorously admits that some of his friends have protested that he is too prone to play the devil's advocate, to give "too many cakes to Cerberus," with the risk of "making, by excess of candour, the arguments of atheism so strong that we could not answer them." But he has no fear—at least, for himself. "I dip my pen in the blackest ink, because I am not afraid of falling into the ink-pot." This is amusing, but a little exasperating, because less hopeful souls do not find the descent into Avernus so easily avoided. Some may feel at times in this book that he is "horribly at ease in Zion." Some may feel, too, that in dealing with Fate, Beauty, Power, Wealth, he has produced a mirage rather than a substance. It is not perhaps without significance that the last essay in the volume is on Illusions. The fact is that Emerson is at times as dialectic, even as casuistical, as Browning, and, like Browning,

gives one the impression of enjoying the spectacle of his own mental ground and lofty tumbling. Both enjoy the exhilaration of pursuing ideas over the thinnest of ice, certain of being buoyed up by their temperamental optimism. One cannot say that there is any falling-off of power in *The Conduct of Life*—certainly there is no falling off in intelligence. It lacks some of the glow and serenity of the *Society and Solitude* of 1870; but it was prepared during troublous years.

During the same years he made a new friend and lost two old ones. In 1855, Walt Whitman had published the first edition of *Leaves of Grass* and had sent a copy to Emerson, whose response was one to turn the head of any young poet. "I find it," he wrote, "the most extraordinary piece of wit and wisdom that America has yet contributed. . . . It meets the demand I am always making of what seems sterile and stingy Nature, as if too much handiwork or too much lymph in the temperament were making our Western wits fat and mean. I give you joy of your free and brave thought. I have great joy in it. I find the courage of treatment which so delights us, and which large perception only can inspire. I greet you at the beginning of a great career."

In the second edition of *Leaves of Grass* (1856), Whitman published this letter and displayed, over Emerson's name, the sentence, "I greet you at the beginning of a great career." Emerson ignored the dubious taste of the advertisement and continued to praise the poems. He visited Whitman in New York, and they remained friends, though never intimates, until

Emerson's death. When the third edition of the book was in the press in Boston in 1860, Emerson tried to persuade Whitman to expunge various passages which the public considered offensive, but the younger poet wisely let them stand. His desire to please Emerson was almost pathetic. Each point of Emerson's statement was, he said, "unanswerable"; but he felt that he would be unfaithful to his own soul if he omitted a line which "made his work complete." Much—possibly too much—has been made of this advice of Emerson, as if it were merely the counsel of timidity; but intellectual timidity was surely never one of his failings. No doubt, whatever arguments of expediency he may have advanced, the passages offended *him*—the inveterate chastity of his mind—and the objections were personal.

On the sixth of May, 1862, Thoreau died and was buried in Sleepy Hollow graveyard, in Concord, where Hawthorne and Emerson were to lie in after years. Emerson made the address at the funeral. It was published in the *Atlantic Monthly* and may be read in the volume, *Lectures and Biographical Studies*. In 1852 Emerson had declared in his Journal that the loss of two men would be "most impoverishing" to him: Alcott and Thoreau. The Emersons and perhaps only the Emersons really knew Thoreau. He had lived in their house, been a member of the family. He had weeded their garden, planted their trees, read to them from his writings on winter evenings, amused the children, and acted as *paterfamilias* during Emerson's residence in England. They knew every side of his nature, and they loved him. For Emerson himself, Henry was a

stimulant, a confidant, and a companion, but for the family he was a brother, or at least a good-natured, ingenious, indispensable bachelor uncle. Emerson admired and respected him, and probably loved him, too; but his love was more intellectual and moral than instinctive. Henry's dry humour tickled him, Henry's independence pleased him, Henry's idealism flattered his belief in his own principles. And he never ceased to admire Henry's gift for the right word and phrase. In the essay on Thoreau he quotes with unction such sayings as: "Some circumstantial evidence is very strong, as when you find a trout in the milk"; "The chub is a soft fish, and tastes like boiled brown paper salted"; "The bluebird carries the sky on his back"; "Nature made ferns for pure leaves, to show what she could do in that line"; "Nothing is so much feared as fear. Atheism may comparatively be popular with God himself"; "How can we expect a harvest of thought who have not had a seed-time of character?" "The youth gets together his materials to build a bridge to the moon, or, perchance, a palace or temple on earth, and, at length, the middle-aged man concludes to build a wood-shed with them"; "We are strictly confined to our men to whom we give liberty."

I must not fail to mention Henry's brother, John, who died in early manhood, because Emerson remembered him with affection as the giver of gifts which fulfilled the exigent qualifications of the essay on Gifts. John once put a bluebird house on Emerson's barn and on another occasion took little Waldo to a daguerreotypist's to have his portrait taken. Such gifts cost

the giver no money, but they showed a thoughtfulness that Emerson rightly valued as of the rarest.

On May 24, 1864, Emerson acted as one of the pallbearers at the funeral of Hawthorne, his fellows being Longfellow, Lowell, Holmes, Agassiz, Hoar, Dwight, Whipple, Alcott, Fields, and Judge Norton. As we have seen, he never was able to like Hawthorne's writings. He always believed the man to be greater than his books, and when death cut short a career which seemed to him never to have fulfilled its promise, he experienced a feeling of defeat. Moreover, he had found a curious comfort in Hawthorne's nearness, even when he saw little of him. He had hoped that he might one day "conquer his friendship." After the funeral he quoted, but without comment, James Freeman Clarke's funeral sermon to the effect that Hawthorne had done more justice than any other to the shades of life, shown more sympathy with the crime on our nature, and, like Jesus, was the friend of sinners. One wonders whether he had any suspicion that the "friend of sinners" possessed one kind of wisdom in which he himself was deficient. But he preferred to notice the ravishing beauty of the spring day and the nobility of Hawthorne's face as it lay in the coffin.

Of the other authors of the day, it is perhaps significant that there is no reference to Longfellow in the Journal. Holmes dazzled and amused him by his "convivial talent." He seems to have spoken at a Bryant Festival, held in New York on November 8, 1862, and some notes on the occasion prove that he held a high opinion of Bryant's poetry. What attracted him

in it was its sincerity and its use of American materials. He dared to name a gentian, a jay, a crow. This commendation of Bryant's Americanism is not surprising in a man holding Emerson's views of sincerity. There are times when the latter seems to emulate the former's classical manner, just as there are others, as in "The Humble-bee" and "The Titmouse," when he achieves his concreteness and raciness. Compared with Bryant's, his verse is apoplectic with matter, but he was never able to attain its crystal purity of expression or its reticent simplicity. Nor did he ever achieve the melancholy music of either "June" or "Thanatopsis." Nevertheless, if Emerson had any forerunner in American verse, it was Bryant, and he was well aware that that was so.

CHAPTER NINE

"TIME TO BE OLD"

AT THE end of 1866, during a lecture tour in the West, Emerson wrote the poem, "Terminus." He was then sixty-three years old.

"It is time to be old,
To take in sail:—
The god of bounds,
Who sets to seas a shore,
Came to me in his fatal rounds,
And said: 'No more!'

"As the bird trims her to the gale,
I trim myself to the storm of time,
I man the rudder, reef the sail,
Obey the voice at eve obeyed at prime."

He was to live for sixteen years, and was to retain his intellectual faculties unimpaired for a full decade, but he felt that his productive life was over. It is true that he wrote little after the date of "Terminus," and that he found even the preparation of old material for the press so onerous a task that he was glad to accept the help of friends. But he still liked to quote, as proved

by experience, the lines which he had written twenty years before, in "The World-Soul":

> "Spring still makes spring in the mind
> When sixty years are told;
> Love wakes anew this throbbing heart,
> And we are never old;
> Over the winter glaciers
> I see the summer glow,
> And through the wild-piled snow-drift
> The warm rosebuds below."

As if to prove that spring still made spring in the mind, he published his finest spring poem, "May-Day," as the title poem of a volume containing the verse written during the twenty years since the publication of *Poems*. "May-Day" is his longest poem and one of the most delightful, because of the unusual earthiness of the imagery, much of which would have delighted Keats, and because of the lyric rush and swing of long passages. In no other poem does he write with such sustained ecstasy in the loveliness of nature. The volume also contains the famous "Brahma," which, when it was published in the *Atlantic Monthly,* aroused such astonishment and ridicule. It is merely a versification of passages in the *Bhagavad Gita,* and, as a little girl is reported to have said, "It just means God everywhere." Here also is the noble "Voluntaries," the classic "Days," and the gentle "My Garden," "Waldeinsamkeit," and "Two Rivers." And here is "The Titmouse," in which a chickadee, singing in a wintry landscape, plays for him the same part that the dark-

ling thrush does for Mr. Hardy, but hardly with the same effect. Altogether this second volume of verse adds considerable range and solidity to his reputation as poet.

In 1865, the marriage of his younger daughter, Edith, to Colonel Wm. H. Forbes, gave him great pleasure. In the following year he received the degree of LL.D. from Harvard and was elected an overseer by the Alumni; in 1867, he was Phi Beta Kappa orator at the University, and busied himself in collecting funds for the building of Memorial Hall, erected in honour of Harvard students killed in the war.

In 1870 he was invited to give a course of university lectures and chose as his subject one that had interested him more than thirty years before—"The Natural History of Intellect." He was flattered by the invitation and worked very hard to make the series a success; and his little audience of thirty students appeared well pleased. He felt, however, that he had succeeded in neither matter nor manner, probably sensing the difficulty of speaking on a metaphysical subject in non-metaphysical terms—for his distrust of philosophical terminology was almost morbid—and of assuming an unacademic attitude amid surroundings inevitably academic. He repeated the course the following year, but with no greater satisfaction. His choice of a subject was unfortunate. He should have lectured to classes in English literature, as he long had dreamed of doing.

Meanwhile, during all these years since 1850, he was making yearly journeys to the West. The means

of travel were still so primitive that he was compelled to endure hardships that would have been heroic in a man of much more powerful physique. But his philosophy stood him in good stead. He never fretted about hindrances or delays, but welcomed them as opportunities for observation and notetaking. And the free manners and progressive spirit of the Western towns and cities both pleased and excited him. Here, as he said, was America in the raw, but in the making. A few excerpts from his letters will make clear that he was acquiring his knowledge of America in the making at a high price of discomfort. "Two nights spent in railcars and the third on the floor of a canal-boat, where the cushion allowed me for a bed was crossed at the knees by another tier of sleepers as long-legged as I, so that in the air was a wreath of legs." "My chief adventure was the necessity of riding in a buggy forty-eight miles to Grand Rapids; then, after the lecture, twenty more on the return; and the next morning getting back to Kalamazoo in time for the train." "Yesterday morning in bitter cold weather I had the pleasure of crossing the Mississippi in a skiff. . . . Much of the rowing was on the surface of fixed ice, in fault of running water." "A raw, cold country this, and plenty of night-travelling and arriving at four in the morning to take the last and worst bed in the tavern. . . . Mercury 15° below zero." The spirit which carried him on was, he frankly admitted, mercenary, although he was, of course, glad to carry his message to the kindly people of the North and West, even though "in all that is called cultivation, they are only ten years old." Few

accomplishments of his life are more remarkable than this of setting forth each winter "to wade, and freeze, and ride, and run, and suffer all manner of indignities," in order to stand up for an hour each night, reading in a hall. He looked upon it half-humorously as a wager with himself, which, by sheer courage and perseverance, he always won.

His position as overseer of Harvard served to renew his interest in education in general. His views of college education, expressed at the time, anticipated the free elective system carried out by President Eliot, and the scholarship awards now common all over the country. He was particularly impatient of the waste of money and energy involved in the attempt to educate young men who had no desire to study—"Coxcombs," he called them. And he pleaded especially for more teaching of poetry, as the best means of stimulating the imagination.

His educational interests brought him into contact with Louis Agassiz, who perhaps occupied to some degree the place in his life of Thoreau. The abounding spirits of the naturalist, his simplicity and naturalness, and his encyclopedic knowledge all made him a companion such as is seldom found and he remained Emerson's friend to the end. With other members of the Saturday Club they belonged to the Adirondack Club, and went on several camping trips to what was then the primeval forest of the mountains. Emerson has left an account of one such trip in the poem, "The Adirondacks." He took great satisfaction in talking with the guides, watching their manual dexterity, and

discovering how the science of man had originated in primitive necessity. He learned to shoot with a rifle, but could never bring himself to kill any creature with it.

In 1871, together with John M. Forbes, father of his son-in-law, and a party of young folks, he journeyed to California. James B. Thayer, one of the group, has left an entertaining account of the pilgrimage. Emerson was very happy. "How *can* Mr. Emerson be so agreeable, all the time, without getting tired?" asked one of the young ladies; and Mr. Thayer testifies that he was a delightful travelling companion. And he also testifies that Emerson was fond of pie. "Here was Emerson," says Holmes, naturally interested as a physician, "a hopelessly confirmed pie-eater, never, so far as I remember, complaining of dyspepsia; and there, on the other side, was Carlyle, feeding largely on wholesome oatmeal, groaning with indigestion all his days, and living with half his self-consciousness habitually centred beneath his diaphragm." Perhaps no more eloquent argument for optimism, as against pessimism, can be urged than this. Emerson held strongly that there are two chief causes of indigestion —an introverted mind and apprehension of evil.

His happiness in the California journey was partly due to the contrast it afforded in its luxury and speed with his earlier journeys in the West. He was startled by the expansiveness and expensiveness which he found in California, but he recognized the "immense prospective advantage" of the state. "There is an awe and terror lying over this new garden, all empty as yet of

any adequate people, yet with this assured future in American hands; unequalled in climate and production. Chicago and St. Louis are toys to it in its assured felicity. I should think no young man would come back from it."

He visited Salt Lake City and met Brigham Young, but neither man seems to have impressed the other. He stopped at Niagara Falls on the way home. His thirst for new scenes and experiences remained unabated, and he never really grew old. And yet, from 1870 onward, he began to show signs of physical failing, particularly in a loss of memory of names, which caused him trouble in his lectures and which, as it increased, made him diffident about appearing in company at all. He was able, notwithstanding, in the summer of 1870 to write an introduction to a translation of Plutarch's *Morals,* comparing a Greek version with the English. Between 1870 and 1874, he busied himself with his anthology, *Parnassus,* in which the editorial work was done largely by his daughter. And he was correcting the proof sheets of a new volume, *Letters and Social Aims,* when all work was cut short by the burning of his house. Through the truly heroic efforts of neighbours, his books and furniture were all saved, but many of his papers and the proof sheets were consumed.

In this exigency, he was urged to make another visit to Europe and, after much hesitation, set sail with his daughter Ellen on October 28, 1872. After ten days in London, he left for Paris, where he met Lowell, and thence proceeded to Marseilles, Nice, and Rome. The next step in his journey was to Cairo, when George

Bancroft entertained him, and they sailed up the Nile as far as Philæ. But he was mildly homesick and the vestiges of antiquity aroused in him a feeling of his own insignificance. He returned gladly to Rome, much improved in health and with sufficiently renewed energy to plan literary work. In Florence he met Herman Grimm once more, and in Paris, Renan, Taine, and Turgenev. In London, at the request of Thomas Hughes, he spoke at the Workingmen's College, but declined all other invitations to appear in public. He breakfasted with Gladstone, met Browning, and saw Carlyle once more. At Oxford, he was the guest of Max Müller, who introduced him to Jowett and Dodgson (Lewis Carroll), and took him to hear a lecture by Ruskin—"the next day I heard Ruskin lecture, and then we went home with Ruskin to his chambers; where he showed us his pictures, and told us his doleful opinions of modern society." Ruskin was at this time Slade Professor of Art at Oxford and was attracting such crowds of auditors to the Sheldonian Theatre that he often had to give his lectures twice. Emerson considered his lecture a model in both material and manner, but could not stomach his gloomy views of modern civilization. From Oxford the party went to Stratford-on-Avon, and thence to Durham and Edinburgh, where he met many old friends, and to the Lakes, where Alexander Ireland entertained them until they sailed for home.

He reached Concord in May, to find the town, "down to the babies in their wagons," turned out to receive him and escort him to his house, which had

been carefully restored in his absence. He walked between rows of schoolchildren and under arches of flowers. He spoke to his fellow townsfolk at the front gate, and then hastened to inspect his old study, in which he found every book, picture, and keepsake in its place as if a fire had never been. The credit for this thoughtful and generous undertaking was due largely to the same Le Baron Russell whose energy years before had made possible the publication of *Sartor Resartus*. Needless to say, Emerson was profoundly moved by this evidence of the affection of his friends. He was, moreover, touched by the fact that much of the money—all subscribed without solicitation—had been provided by persons whom he had never known. He was troubled to think that his habits of solitude had perhaps kept him from knowing them.

In the following year, he was nominated for the office of Lord Rector of Glasgow University, receiving five hundred votes against seven hundred cast for Disraeli, who was elected. He was delighted by the honour, accounting the vote "quite the fairest laurel" that had ever fallen on him. In 1875 he journeyed to Philadelphia to visit his childhood friend, William Henry Furness, and there was joined by that other friend of a lifetime, Samuel Bradford. This was a crowning joy for all three, and they spent day after day together, in reminiscence of the times when they attended Mrs. Whitwell's School, and the Latin School, and Mr. Webb's writing class, and Harvard College. On the 19th of April of the same year, he made the address at the unveiling of Daniel Chester French's

statue of the Minute Man—probably the last written by his own hand.

In 1870 had appeared *Society and Solitude,* one of his most gracious works, full of good cheer and shrewd loquacity. There is a homely flavour in the essays on "Domestic Life," "Farming," "Books," and "Clubs." He had nothing new to say on essentials, but he had accumulated a wealth of observation and example and had gained a practical experience that make this volume and the next perhaps the most grateful to the reader who cares little about his philosophy. The "Books" is almost breath-taking in its veering, glancing survey of the centuries. From "Domestic Life" I have quoted a characteristic passage in a previous chapter. "Works and Days" is in part one of his greatest essays. "Art" should be read by all who wish to obtain a point of view regarding his attitude on a subject about which some critics have maintained he knew nothing. "Courage," especially, retains much of his old fire.

Letters and Social Aims, prepared for the press by his generous and faithful friend, Mr. Cabot, repeats the tone of *Society and Solitude.* Here are essays on Persian Poetry, Progress of Culture, Greatness, Inspiration, The Comic, Immortality, which, though they may not add to his reputation, certainly in no way detract from it. Of special interest is the "Immortality," because the public have always been curious concerning his views on an after life. The criticism always passed on the poignant "Threnody" has been that it shows no evidence of faith in immortality; and the

curious will find nothing definite on the subject here. He seems never to have convinced himself that survival was necessarily to be desired; and yet, as one of his friends once said, his entire life from day to day was that of a man who had no doubt that he would survive. One concludes that he troubled his mind very little about it, but lived "in the moment" assured that the best plan is, as the moralist Vauvenargues puts it, to live as if one would live always.

There is little more to tell of his last years. From 1875 onward he spoke only occasionally in public and found himself quite unable to concentrate on work. In 1876 he did travel as far as Virginia, accompanied as usual by his daughter, Ellen, to speak at the University. His reception by the students was so discourteous that he cut his lecture short by one half; but on the train northward found himself the centre of a reception of passengers who recognized him. Such recognitions were now a daily occurrence, and he was the recipient of courtesies from strangers everywhere. "Everywhere," says his son, "in his own part of the country he was watched over by an unknown bodyguard, some of whom could usually be reckoned on to provide a seat, a carriage, or to render any needed service."

In the spring of 1879 he sat for the bust by French, which his family considered the best likeness. The sculptor's description of him in his old age is as follows:

I think it is very seldom that a face combines such vigour and strength in the general form and plan with such exceeding delicacy and sensitiveness in the details. Henry James somewhere speaks

of the "over-modelled American face." No face was ever *more* modelled than was Mr. Emerson's; there was nothing slurred, nothing accidental; but it was like the perfection of detail in great sculpture. Neither did it interfere with an almost childlike mobility that admitted of an infinite variety of expression, and made possible that wonderful "lighting-up" of the face, so often spoken of by those who knew him. It was the attempt to catch that glorifying expression that made me despair of my bust. . . . When the bust was approaching completion he looked at it after one of the sittings, and said, "The trouble is, the more it resembles me, the worse it looks."

The days passed serenely. He had no financial worries. His children were all successful, dutiful, and loving. He still loved to walk, but was forced to reduce his daily stint to a mile, a half mile. In the summer he bathed in the ocean until the year before his death, strolling in the woods afterward or sitting on the piazza and watching his grandchildren at play.

He had always dreaded a death preceded by a long illness, but his last illness was mercifully brief. In April, 1882, he caught cold, which developed into pneumonia, attended, however, by little suffering. Ten days before his death he went for a short walk and for two days more insisted upon dressing and descending to his study. A day or two before his death his eyes fell upon a portrait of Carlyle, and he said, lovingly, "*That* is my man, my man." At the very last his thoughts reverted to his little son.

He died on Thursday, April 27, 1882, and was buried the following Sunday in Sleepy Hollow, the burying place at the consecration of which he had spoken in 1855. His grave was dug at the foot of a

great pine tree, and was marked by an unhewn block of native rose quartz.

" 'Voice of earth to earth returned,
Prayers of Saints that inly burned,—
Saying, *What is excellent*
As God lives, is permanent;
Hearts are dust, heart's loves remain,
Heart's love will meet thee again.

" 'House and tenant go to ground,
Lost in God, in Godhead found.' "

POSTSCRIPT

FROM the biography sketched in the foregoing chapters there emerges, I hope, a personality. I have tried to eschew much comment and interpretation, preferring to use the little space at my disposal for Emerson's own words. As for the facts, they have long been known. I could attempt only to give them a new proportion and emphasis.

No one has ever been more fortunate in his early biographers than he. In James Eliott Cabot he possessed a rarely modest and intelligent friend, and in his own son, an editor who for years collated, annotated, and explained with a unique patience and thoroughness. The other biographers—Holmes, Cooke, Ireland, Conway—according to their diverse temperaments, gave a true picture of him; and his later interpreters, Woodbury, Garnett, Firkins, Sherman, and a veritable host of others, have clarified every detail of his philosophy.

The mass of text and comment would be appalling, were it not that the main lines and features are always the same. Never was Emerson's favourite conception of unity in variety better exemplified than in his own works and in the hermeneutics of his commentators.

At heart he was a beautifully simple person: as simple as a mountain or a tree. On the surface he was as various as either. But all his exfoliations sprang from one primary thought, from one heart.

After his death three collections of scattered papers were published. They are all interesting, but need no special remark. A study of George Willis Cooke's exhaustive Bibliography reveals that each of the works, from the *Essays: First Series* onward, was almost at once translated into German, French and Spanish, and in some instances into Italian. Within a year of his death began the publication of critical and biographical works, by Holmes, Cabot, Ireland, Conway, Cooke, which continued briskly until the end of the century, augmented by the Carlyle-Emerson, Emerson-Grimm, Emerson-Sterling, and other correspondence, and by the ten volumes of the Journal. During the same period, his work excited the greatest interest in Europe, and works dealing with it appeared in all of the major languages. In France and Germany and England, and later in Russia, he became the apostle, not only of individuals, like Maeterlinck, but of movements. Nietzsche is said to have carried a volume of Emerson in his pocket, and Arnold has testified in both verse and prose to the effect of the *Essays* upon the youth of Oxford. In the present century in America, the admirable studies of George Edward Woodbury and John Jay Chapman have proved that he has not been forgotten, and the volume of O. W. Firkins

(1915) is probably the most brilliant and thorough introduction to an American author that we possess.

The opinion that Emerson is among the immortals has hardly a dissentient voice. One would almost like to challenge his reputation if only to be original. One can call him incoherent, spasmodic, visionary. If the critic is logically inclined, he can amuse himself by pointing out wherein Emerson's assertions, if carried to their conclusions, end in a *reductio ad absurdum*. If the critic is a rationalist or a materialist, he can quite plausibly maintain that Emerson's basic principles rest on sheer fantasy. The orthodox can call him an infidel or agnostic. The metaphysician can label him an eclectic and empiricist, who did not really understand his own borrowings. The historian can avow that his history is nonsense. The artist can declare that he knew nothing about art. It sounds like a serious arraignment, and yet it has all been, by various men, brought against him. It all, nevertheless, amounts to very little.

Emerson—to vary one of his own metaphors—presented a universe seen through a temperament. We may not like the temperament, and the universe seen through it may appear to us limited, partial, or unreal; but we cannot escape the revelation that the man possessing the one and expounding the other was one of the most friendly, courageous, and serene the world has known. It is hard to recognize in his universe the same one that we behold through the prism of a Hardy, a Strindberg, or a Dostoievsky, and yet, like them, he

presented it honestly as he saw it. It is a waste of time to quarrel with genius. It speaks and goes its way. And Emerson would have been the last man to require us to accept his universe without question. He hoped that we would try to make our own.

THE END

A CHECK LIST OF EMERSON'S WORKS

Nature, 1836.
Essays: First Series, 1841.
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Representative Men, 1850.
English Traits, 1856.
The Conduct of Life, 1860.
Society and Solitude, 1870.
Letters and Social Aims, 1876.
Lectures and Biographical Sketches, 1884.
Miscellanies, 1883.
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May-Day and Other Pieces, 1867.
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Letters from Ralph Waldo Emerson to a Friend, 1900.
Correspondence between Emerson and Grimm, 1903.
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The Heart of Emerson's Journals, edited by Bliss Perry, 1927.

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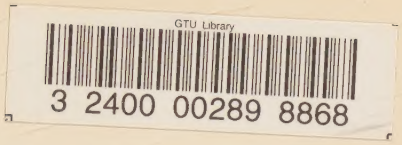

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